

THE LOYALTY OF LANGSTRETH

JOHN R. M. GILLIAT

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

Chap. PZ3 Copyright No.

Shelf G4547L

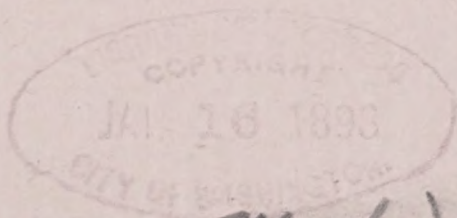
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

THE
LOYALTY OF LANGSTRETH

A NOVEL.

BY
✓
JOHN R. V. GILLIAT,

AUTHOR OF "MRS. LESLIE AND MRS. LENNOX."



CHICAGO:
MORRILL, HIGGINS & CO.

(1893) A

PZ3
G4147L

COPYRIGHT,
1892.
MORRILL, HIGGINS & CO.

W. B. CONKEY COMPANY,
CHICAGO,
PRINTERS AND BINDERS.

To
HUGH WEGUELIN AND ALBERT STOPFORD,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
MANY PLEASANT ENGLISH DAYS.
1888—1892.

"For the crown of our life as it closes
Is darkness—the fruit of it dust;
No thorns go as deep as the rose's,
And love is more cruel than lust.
Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage and death and division
Make barren our lives."

From:

"Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs."

CHAPTER I.

EVERYBODY who knew Miss Chesinde realized that it was necessary for her to marry a rich man. She was thoroughly expensive. She looked costly as she entered a room. Luxury was the essential of her existence.

Miss Chesinde herself, recognizing this fact, refused Archie Langstreth accordingly.

"My dear boy," she said kindly, "I don't see how you can expect me to marry you. You are very handsome and very strong, but we cannot live upon a profile and biceps."

"I can work for you."

"Yes, I know," she replied, "you can work, I suppose. But you never would make any money, never. How would you get on down in Wall street? A bull in a china shop would be nothing to it."

"A bear 'on 'Change' might succeed," said Langstreth. "Old Bob Harcourt said he'd give me a lift any time."

A little laugh parted Miss Chesinde's lips,

"You are too delightful, Archie," she told him. "Mr. Harcourt will give you an exceedingly good mayonnaise at the Savarin and will open a bottle of his choicest Burgundy for you, but he will not give you an income of a hundred thousand a year."

"A hundred thousand! Wouldn't you marry me on less?"

"Yes, *you*," she said. "I would marry you to-day with ten; but you haven't got two. No, my friend, you and I were not born yesterday. Go to Mr. Harcourt and tell him that you want to make a fortune, so that you may be able to marry Viola Chesinde, and he will tell you you had better commit suicide by some easier method."

"Why do you talk like that?" Langstreth asked half angrily.

"You and I must not talk like *this*, Archie," she said with a smile. "We must face things as they are and meet the inevitable bravely. I must marry a rich man and you must marry a rich woman; or, perhaps, I might be able to save enough of my allowance for us to settle down quietly in about forty years."

"Then you don't love me enough to marry me on——"

"A profile?" she interrupted. "No, I do not. One might even love a man too much for that."

"But you do love me?"

"Archie, we are talking of marriage."

Langstreth looked gloomy. He was big and fair and he had blue eyes, but his face suddenly became dark.

"Tell me you love me," he said as he took her hand.

"I shall not tell you that."

"Why not—if it is true?"

"Why not?" repeated Miss Chesinde with a luxurious smile. "Well, because!"

A little silver filigree clock struck the hour. It was five; they both counted the chime.

"Well, because—?" said Langstreth.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Miss Chesinde, "what persistence. You remind me of my poor old aunt, the Countess Qu'appelle, who asked questions all her life and died with raised eyebrows. She would ask why when she entered paradise."

"This isn't exactly paradise for me," said Archie.

"Will you have a whisky and soda, then?" said Miss Chesinde, as she got up and rang the bell. "I am ready for tea," she said to the servant who answered her summons. "And bring Mr. Langstreth the liquor case and some soda water."

"I don't want anything to drink," said Archie, sullenly, when they were alone again.

"Very well; you need not have it. What do you want?" she asked.

"I want you to tell me that you love me," he replied.

Miss Chesinde moved from one side of the ottoman to the other. She was silent a moment as she followed the intricate tracteries of the Persian rug with the narrow pointed toe of her slipper.

"I shall not tell you that I love you," she said slowly, with a little lingering tenderness in her tone—"for two reasons. One reason is that I am not going to marry you, and the other is that I am going to marry some one else. And I shall not give myself to another man having told you—*that*."

"But it is true,"

"Then if it is true it is very sad. Nevertheless I shall not say it."

"And what is to become of me?" asked Langstreth, as if he did not much care what became of himself.

"Become of you?" said Miss Chesinde. "I do not want anything to become of you. You are very nice as you are. I would not have you change for anything. I shall keep you for my friend."

"I can not be your friend."

"My enemy? Archie!"

"I shall be your lover, always," he said.

Miss Chesinde looked again at the pointed embroidered toes of her slippers. For one brief instant she felt that life was not worth this sacrifice which she was making. She was discarding happiness as if it were an old glove. She knew that she loved Langstreth, and she knew that happiness could come to her in no other way than by that of becoming his wife. The embroidered slippers seemed to smile mockingly up into her eyes.

They were exceedingly pretty and had cost twenty dollars. Love will not pay for the

caparison of beauty. There were a score of equally pretty, equally costly pairs upstairs. She could see them in her mind's eye in a row like a glittering ballet.

"Archie," she said, breaking the silence. "You and I must not talk of love. It is not fair to ourselves or to each other."

"You need not be so considerate of me," he replied; "I can bear it."

"Well, then, *I* can't," said Miss Chesinde. "And here is the tea."

A man servant entered and arranged the silver service upon a low table which stood before a decorative screen, upon which Cupids were painted ambushed in roses.

Miss Chesinde was nearly always at home at five o'clock. It was what she called "her own hour." She seemed more luxurious, more opulent than at any other time.

Langstreth thought her handsomer than ever as she left the low reclining couch which she had occupied, and trailed her soft draperies to a small straw chair at the side of the tea-table. She was dressed in rose-colored crepe, her throat and wrists buried in fluffy masses of

silver fox. She left an indescribable aroma as she moved; vague, indistinct, subtle.

"Come over here," she said to her visitor, as she pointed to an ottoman tempting with many cushions. "Come and sit beside me and tell me what you have been doing since I saw you last. You are not a bit like yourself. Come, Archie, be a man."

"You treat me as if I were a child."

"You do not look like a child," she said with an amused, flickering laugh. "You look like a gladiator. But I shall begin to think that muscle does not make a man. You are quite a boy; you are *enfant gate*. Now mix yourself a whisky and soda. I'll let you smoke if you'll promise to be good." She drew his case from his pocket while she was speaking, and handed him a cigarette. "Now smile," she said.

"That is all I wanted," said Langstreth, smiling at her bidding. "A cigarette and a whisky and soda. Such trifles as love have nothing to do with perfect happiness."

"Don't be silly."

"That is cynicism, not silliness."

"And what philosopher can prove them un-

like?" she asked. "If you are going to become pessimistic I shall send you home."

"I haven't got a home."

"You've got a dozen clubs."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Langstreth, "I wish women had clubs. Then you would know how to value *this*."

"I do value it," Miss Chesinde replied. "I value it very highly—" She was going to add that she valued it altogether too much to lose, but refrained from wounding him.

She had poured out her tea and was playing with her spoon. There was a moment of silence. Langstreth, watching the tiny bubbles chase each other from the bottom to the top of his glass, was contrasting his own lonely bachelor home with the luxury of his present surroundings.

"Oh!—here is Aunt Edith," said Miss Chesinde, as the hall door closed heavily. "She is early. I did not hear the carriage drive up. Now, Archie, be nice to her because she is so good to me."

"I'm good to you, too," retorted Langstreth, "but that does not make you nice to me."

"Not? Why, you're the only man in the whole world I—— Oh! Aunt Edith, is that you? Come in and have your tea," as the portieres were drawn aside. "No one is here except Mr. Langstreth."

Mrs. Clandon entered voluminously. She was very large and retained the remnants of beauty by a certain gracious dismissal of youth.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Langstreth," she said with raised lorgnon. "Make my tea very weak, Viola. My nerves are everywhere to-day. Has Guy come in?"

Miss Chesinde poured out a cup of weak tea which Langstreth handed to Mrs. Clandon, and neither of them made any definite attempt at conversation.

"It is a horrid day," went on Mrs. Clandon as she sipped her tea. "Paderewski played divinely at the Vanhoffman's. Everybody was there. No end of smart frocks. Do you know, Alys Vanhoffman received with a crown on her head. You should have gone, Viola."

"Oh! we have been very comfortable and very happy here," said Miss Chesinde, at

which Mrs. Clandon raised her eyebrows with incredulous surprise.

It was not long before Langstreth discovered that it was "getting late."

"How I have stayed on," he said apologetically. "You see that is the penalty you pay for being so hospitable and having such a charming house, Mrs. Clandon."

"Not a word for the niece," said Miss Chesinde.

Langstreth shook hands. "When shall I see you again?" he asked.

"Whenever you choose to come at this hour. I am going to the Willoughby's on Thursday, but post-Lenten gaieties are doleful at best. Besides, you and I do not need excuses to meet."

Then they said good-bye.

"I think you are very free and easy with Mr. Langstreth," said Mrs. Clandon, when the hall door had closed. "It seems a little—well, a little fast, I might say, to give a man whisky in the library. I wonder where Guy is."

"At the Knickerbocker—a hundred to one," said Miss Chesinde carelessly. "As for that

other matter I am not at all free and easy with Archie Langstreth. We are simply good friends. And the soda water and whisky—well, he doesn't like tea and I felt inclined to make him feel at home."

"He seemed very much at home," Mrs. Clandon replied. "If he were anything but an ineligible it might be different. But it is so dangerous for a girl to have her name coupled with a man like that. It keeps off other men."

"The farther off the better in some cases," said Viola. "Archie Langstreth is twenty times the man most of them are."

"Why, my dear, he's as poor as—as—"

"I am speaking of men—not gold mines," said Miss Chesinde opulently. "And mentioning the latter reminds me of Guy. Here he is."

Guy Clandon was regarded as a very great person in New York. He was twenty-four years old and he was worth ten millions. He had said once in Miss Chesinde's presence that he could marry any girl he knew, and she had told him that he was mistaken.

He entered the little elaborate library and

stood for an instant with the heavy portiere clutched in his hand.

"What the devil is the matter with Langstreth?" he asked unsteadily.

"Matter?" inquired Mrs. Clandon.

"He must be drunk," said Guy. "I passed him just now on the steps and he hardly spoke to me. He acts as if he were the Lord Almighty."

"I should think he would feel disappointed in some of his creation, then," said Miss Chesinde as she got up and passed her cousin in the doorway.

"Viola—I say—"

"You can not say it now," she replied as she began to ascend the stairs. "It is time for me to dress."

She went to her room and called her maid. Then in silence she sat down before her mirror and resigned herself to her toilet.

She suddenly became aware of some one looking at her from the outer room from which her dressing-room opened.

"Jove! what lovely hair," said a voice that was indistinct and uncertain.

"Thank you," replied Miss Chesinde without turning her head. In the mirror she could see Clandon as he stood in the doorway.

"We shall be alone at dinner," he said. "The mater is going out." While he spoke he steadied himself with difficulty, and held on to a screen with his right hand for support.

"What is the matter, Guy," she asked, still viewing him in the glass. "You look ill."

"Club — and cocktails," he answered, wetting his dry lips with his tongue.

"You would better go and take a cold bath," said Miss Chesinde with indifference. "I have heard that is a good remedy."

"You are not angry?" he asked.

"Angry? No. But you must go away now and dress. It is late. No, Guy, you can not come in here. I have been very obliging even to let you stand at the door; another time I shall tell Lucie to shut it."

"Lucie would not do it," he said with a leer. "You are not angry with me for being drunk, are you, Viola?"

"You are not drunk," said Miss Chesinde. "And, on general principles, I do not care in

the least whether you are or not; but I should be very angry indeed if you came into my presence while you were so."

"That's all right. You're a good girl, Viola," he said as he walked away unsteadily.

"Shut the door, Lucie," Miss Chesinde commanded, "and open the windows in the other room."

She felt, suddenly, as if she should suffocate. Her head swam. She wished that by the mere closing of her door she could shut herself away from everybody forever. Men seemed odious to her—except one man, whose love she had resigned. Her lips trembled with a smileless sigh.

When the maid returned she found Miss Chesinde standing in the middle of the room. Her stockinged feet showed below the lowest fold of her gown. In her hand she held the embroidered slippers with their pointed toes. The thin soles were broken in half between toe and heel.

"Take these away," she said indolently; "they have hurt me all the afternoon. I have always hated them."

CHAPTER II.

For some time Miss Chesinde said nothing while Lucie arranged her hair.

"I wish I were a queen," she said at length, "and you should be one of my dressing-women, Lucie. The queen of England has three, but I should have three hundred."

When it became necessary to put on her dress, she said:

"I am going to wear that cloth-of-silver to-night, Lucie; the new one. I am tired to death of everything. If I were a queen I should never wear a dress but once. They should be your perquisites, Lucie."

She stood in front of her long mirrors when her toilet was complete. "That is almost regal," she declared, smiling. "If I only had a diadem! Where is the flight of butterflies, the diamonds and sapphires?"

"Those which Mr. Guy gave you?" asked Lucie.

"Yes; I haven't a hundred sets of diamonds and sapphires."

The butterflies were forthcoming. They formed a crown, of brilliant wings and azure bodies, which was worthy of a sovereign. Lucie fastened them in the golden masses of Miss Chesinde's hair.

"How do I look?" she inquired, as she started to descend to the drawing-room.

"You must ask Mr. Guy," said the maid.

The drawing-room was empty except for Berrie, the butler, who, as soon as Miss Chesinde entered, approached her with a great bunch of cut roses.

"These were left for you a moment ago," he said.

"Was there no name, no card?"

"Linton opens the door at this hour, ma'am. He said there wasn't any name left. Shall I send for Lucie to take them?"

"No—that is, yes," said Miss Chesinde, as she drew out the largest rose among them. "You may take them to her, Berrie, and tell her they are to go upon my dressing table. At what time is dinner?"

"Dinner is served now, whenever Mr. Clandon is ready."

"Is he not ready?"

"He has been ringing all the bells in the house, ma'am," replied Berrie, solemnly. "He's got John and Buttons helping him now."

"That is all, then," said Miss Chesinde. "Send word to Mr. Clandon that I am waiting. Heavens!" she said to herself when she was alone, "what a life." She held the single rose in her hand and she pressed it to her lips unconsciously. A drop of water clinging to its leaves felt cool upon her mouth.

"He has only two thousand a year," she soliloquized, "and yet he sends me roses which cost a dollar apiece."

Then she sat down wearily with a sigh.

"It would not be fair to him," she said to herself again; "not fair to him. He is generous, and it would torture him to deny me the luxuries of life. He would be miserable in a month."

Miss Chesinde had no fortune. Her father and mother had both died in her infancy, and Mrs. Clandon, her mother's sister, had insti-

tuted herself as protector. Having no daughters of her own, and discovering that Viola was beautiful, she was pleased to find her duties as chaperon light and agreeable. But she had let her niece know from childhood that her future must be in her own hands.

"I have no money, my dear," she used to say to her. "I never did have any, but I made my own future. While I live, Viola, you shall have a home with me, and an allowance. But you must remember that everything belongs to Guy. I am only a pensioner. I simply have my widow's mite during my lifetime."

The widow's mite was the income at a big per cent. of two millions.

To do Mrs. Clandon justice she was very kind to her sister's child. She gave her every luxury that money could procure, and as much of affection and sympathy as was in her to bestow. But Miss Chesinde had understood long ago that her future must be of her own making.

Therefore, sitting in the brilliant white and gold drawing-room, she resolved to dismiss the image of Langstreth from her mind.

It was not an easy task. She could see him

standing before her, strong, erect, with a reproach in his eyes. How blue they were; and they said to her, "I love you."

"Oh! Archie," she said aloud, "it is impossible. You must go away. Thank you—dear, for the roses;" then she kissed the rose she held, passionately.

A few minutes afterward Guy Clandon came in.

"Dinner is ready," he said a little vaguely, as if he were talking through a telephone. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting. John is a fool."

"What has he done?"

"He ordered my button-hole of orchids instead of gardenias," said Clandon. "Everybody in New York knows I always wear gardenias."

"I should think you would like to give everybody a surprise then," said Miss Chesinde, as she glanced at the white flower and recognized the cause of her delayed dinner. "I should dislike to have everybody know my preferences. If I were you I should wear a thistle."

"It would be such an ugly fashion to set," he replied sententiously.

Berrie held the portieres open and they entered the dining-room together.

Guy Clandon was tall and fair, with washed-out grey eyes and a complexion of chalk. He was very thin and stooped habitually, which gave him the appearance of illness. Except for a certain innate refinement and delicacy of feature he had nothing outwardly to recommend him, yet people called him good looking. His coats were beyond criticism and his boots were marvels. He wore a slight moustache, which was so pale as to be indistinguishable in the distance and seemed only to grow slowly as he approached.

"If that cook can't clear the soup better than this," he said to the butler, when they had taken their seats, "you had better send him away."

"You might dine at one of your clubs or at Delmonico's," suggested Miss Chesinde.

"I don't flatter myself that you care for my society."

"I was only thinking of you, Guy," she answered. "The soup seems very nice to me, Do you feel better than you did?"

"Yes; I took your advice."

"You mean you took a cold bath?"

"Ice-cold."

"You should be careful. I am not sure that I should have recommended it if I had believed in your obedience. It is very dangerous."

"If I were to die you would not be sorry."

"Why not?" she asked. "I am not your heir."

Clandon laughed consciously. He felt his importance with every breath he drew. "I suppose I ought to be thinking of marriage," he said slowly, continuing the thought of his heirless demise.

"That is what the mothers of a great many girls are thinking that you should do," said Miss Chesinde.

This was perfectly true. Guy Clandon was the bull's eye in the matrimonial target at which all scheming mothers aimed.

"He is the biggest catch in New York," Mrs. Thorncroft-Thorne had once declared to her daughter. "He has half a million a year, and is sure to drink himself to death before he is thirty."

To which Miss Evelyn Thorne had replied that she was sick to death of Guy Clandon's name. "How is a girl to catch a man," she asked irritably, "who knows more about cocktails than he does about cotillions?"

When dinner was over Miss Chesinde ordered her coffee in the small drawing-room.

"I suppose you will go out," she said to Guy. "Have you anything on to-night?"

"The Eresbys have a dance," he answered, "but I am not going. May I take my coffee with you, Viola?"

"Of course," she replied graciously enough, as she gave the order to the butler. "I decided on the little room on account of the piano, but if you like we can go into the library where you can smoke."

"No; I do not care to smoke yet. Later I shall go to the club. Are you going anywhere?"

Miss Chesinde was dressed as if she were going to a ball. "I am going to bed," she said, "at about ten o'clock."

"You look like a queen," Guy said as they went up the wide stairs into the softly shaded room where the coffee was served.

It was an elaborate little room, decorated a la Louis Quinze, comfortable and luxurious as well. Miss Chesinde chose a huge chair that stood in a corner and had for a background a rare piece of tapestry and a jungle of palms.

"That is your throne," said Clandon, as he placed a footstool at her feet with mock obeisance.

She felt for an instant almost pleased with her cousin. The pallor of his face seemed to indicate delicacy more than dissipation. Her own health was so perfect that she suddenly felt a strange, uncompromising pity for weakness.

"I wish you wouldn't drink so much," she said to him.

"I know; it is a bad thing. But every one does it. There isn't anything else to do."

"Oh, if you feel that way," she said, with a shrug, returning at once to her indifference.

"Besides, no one cares."

"There you are wrong," replied Miss Chesinde. "Aunt Edith cares and I care."

Berrie entered bearing the coffee service;

behind him the Buttons with sugar and the *liqueurs*.

It struck the half hour after nine. "I will have the brougham at ten, Berrie," said Clandon, as he dismissed the servants.

There followed a moment of silence, in which there was a little rattle of coffee spoons. Guy tossed a dash of *fine champagne* into his cup.

"Viola," he said, "you are wearing my rose."

Miss Chesinde's hand went suddenly to her breast, as if there were pain there where the rose lay.

"Yours!"

"Certainly," he answered, stirring his coffee slowly. "Did you not get the roses I sent?"

"Oh!—they came," she said mechanically. "I forgot to thank you for them, Guy; but—thank you, now."

"Your wearing one is thanks enough."

"You are very kind; the roses are beautiful." Nevertheless, as she spoke she drew the flower from the chiffon at her bosom and held it half reluctantly between her fingers.

She felt suddenly as if some great sorrow had befallen her, and then, after a moment's hesitation, she laid the rose gently upon the table beside her.

A sense of despair swept over her. "I think I will go to my room," she said, rising, "I feel tired—ill."

Clandon got up, too. There was a look in his pale face which had never been there before.

"Viola," he said, going to her side, but without raising his voice, "I love you; I cannot make you a queen, but I can give you what a queen would have—riches and power—if you will be my wife."

They confronted each other in silence. The flush that dyed her face gave her a new loveliness in his sight.

"I know I am not much of a fellow," he went on in a low voice, which seemed to reach out toward her as his arms did, "but perhaps you can make something of me if you will consent to try."

The whole phantasma of her life enrolled before her, future and past. This was the rich

marriage she must make. This was her future. It had come. She closed her eyes to see more clearly.

This was her future and she must stretch out her hand to take it. She did stretch out her hand with a little blind gesture, and Guy met it half way with both his own.

"Thank you," she said unsteadily, "I will marry you."

Then she moved away from him in the direction of the hall, pausing in the curtained doorway.

"Bring me my rose," she said as she turned to him with a movement full of sweetness indicating the flower she had left upon the table. Then she went to his side again and drew the white gardenia from the lapel of his coat. "You must wear roses now and all the world will see that you have foregone gardenias for my sake."

"Give me one kiss, Viola," he besought, roused to boldness by her manner.

She stood perfectly still, as a prisoner stands to receive the chains, while Clandon put his lips against hers.

In another instant, with a whispered good-night, she fled up stairs.

Locked in her own room, she suddenly became aware of a sensation of positive elation.

"I am to be a queen," she told Lucie, who combed out her golden hair. "I am going to have a crown on my head and sit on a throne and the whole world shall bow down to me."

The prospect was dazzling.

"Lucie," she said abruptly, with a little catching of her breath, "you may go now. I want to be alone; and those roses, you may take them away. Put them—anywhere."

CHAPTER III.

The next day the engagement was announced.

Mrs. Clandon expressed her approval. She confided to Guy that he had acted wisely and she told Viola that she had done well.

It was arranged that the marriage should take place at Newport in August, and accordingly Mrs. Clandon proposed a short sojourn abroad during the intervening months.

"We will have a little taste of the London season," she said to Viola, "and then there is your lingerie to be got and M. Worth to be consulted, and in July Guy can join us and bring us home."

So the matter was settled and Miss Chesinde was fain to acknowledge that the parting with her fiancé was not terrible.

To do Clandon justice, however, he was honestly proud of his conquest; and during the three days' interval between the announcement of his engagement and Miss Chesinde's depart-

ure, he limited himself at cocktails and bore himself with the dignity befitting his changed estate. But before the steamer was well in the offing he felt the exhilaration of regained freedom, and his clubs and pet cafés held out their allurements once more.

About this time he met Langstreth one afternoon on the avenue.

‘How are you,’ he said to him good-naturally. ‘Haven’t seen you for ages. What would you say to a cocktail, eh?’

‘I should say no to the cocktail and thank you to you,’ said Archie. ‘I am just bound to Mrs. Flodden-Field’s.’

‘Give her my love,’ said Clandon as he hailed a hansom. ‘I might go myself only I can’t drink tea; it gets on my nerves.’

‘By the way, I haven’t congratulated you yet,’ said Langstreth as he made an effort to hold out his hand naturally. ‘I do congratulate you most heartily. You have won a woman worth winning.’

‘Oh! thanks,’ said Guy. ‘I know you and Viola were great friends.’

‘I did not see Miss Chesinde before she

sailed or I should have congratulated her," Langstreth went on; "and I have been trying to decide whether our degree of friendship would permit the liberty of a letter."

"I dare say she would be glad to hear from you if you care to write. They will be at Thomas', Berkeley Square, for a month."

"Well, I won't keep you," said Langstreth as the hansom wheeled up.

"Sorry you won't come along," Clandon called out as he climbed into the cab, and the two men waved a mutual farewell.

Mrs. Flodden-Field was very fashionable. Her house was one of the most charming in New York, and she herself was one of the most charming women. She could afford by the right of ancestry and prestige to draw her lines where she chose, and she knew just where to draw them. It was useless to cavil at her decrees.

To Langstreth she had long ago extended her confidence and her friendship; therefore when he found himself ascending the three low steps which led from the street to her door he felt almost as if he were going home.

Mrs. Flodden-Field was in the drawing-room as he entered; she rose from her low reclining chair and advanced to meet him with an outstretched hand and a pretty smile of welcome on her lips and in her eyes.

"If I had been choosing something quite delightful," she exclaimed, "it would have been a visit from you."

"I believe in you so implicitly that I must believe that," said Archie, laughing. "You will make me a splendid egotist if you are not careful. May I ring for tea?"

"Is it five o'clock already? I had no idea it was so late. I must have dreamed the hours away."

"I met Clandon on the avenue," said Langstreth as he touched the bell, "and I refused his club hospitality for this of your's. The tea, therefore, becomes a matter of conscience."

"There are such things as decanters," suggested his hostess; "and speaking of—decanters, how is Mr. Clandon?"

"Better than usual, I am afraid."

"Oh! well, never mind," said Mrs. Flodden-Field, sympathetically. "So you have let

Viola Chesinde engage herself to him. I should not have believed that of you."

"I should not have believed it of her. But it was not my fault."

"Archie Langstreth, how silly you can be!" exclaimed Mrs. Flodden-Field in the tone of an oracle. "You dare to sit here and tell me that. Why, I would rather marry your little finger than twenty Guy Clandons."

"One is bad enough," said Langstreth, grimly.

"Yet you have let her do it."

"She has not done it yet, but I shall not prevent her."

"You ought to. There is plenty of time. She is only engaged to him."

"The fact that she is engaged to him is enough," said Langstreth.

Mrs. Flodden-Field knew perfectly well that Langstreth loved Miss Chesinde, and she was none the less honest in her avowed friendship for Viola in that, in this instance she gave all her sympathy to him.

"Are you going to sit down calmly and let her marry that—that cousin?" she asked. Her

tone would have led a foreigner to believe that a cousin might mean a cannibal.

"I certainly haven't been calm," asserted Archie. "I paced my room for three nights and very nearly took to drink."

"Well," she exclaimed with a quaint gesture of disgust, "perhaps that would have been wise. That sort of thing seems to be attractive."

"Oh, that is not fair to Miss Chesinde."

"Has she been fair to you?" asked Mrs. Flodden-Field. "She isn't fair even to herself."

"I did my best," said Langstreth, rising and moving restlessly about the room. "I told her I loved her."

Mrs. Flodden-Field's eyelids trembled vaguely for an instant at his words.

"You ought to have told her that she loved you. I gave you more credit for diplomacy, my friend," she said, with the conviction of superior wisdom and long experience. "You might tell her you loved her till doomsday. Every man living tells every woman that, and we grow used to it in time. Women love ty-

rants, not slaves. A great big fellow like you! Why, if worst came to worst, you could run away with her bodily."

"The worst has come," said Langstreth slowly, "but I shall not run away with Clandon's wife."

A moment's pause followed.

"Of course," said Mrs. Flodden-Feld, breaking a thoughtful silence, "I shall make a fight for it. I do not intend to have you two people make each other miserable for life. I shall let Viola get her trousseau, because Edith Clandon will pay for it. Then she shall marry you."

Langstreth got up and walked across the room. He took up a bowl which was said to have belonged to each of the consecutive wives of Henry VIII. and examined it carefully. Then he resumed his seat beside Mrs. Flodden-Field's tea-table.

"You know I have loved Miss Chesinde," he said. "I have loved her desperately. But I would not marry her now—now—"

"Not to save her from shame—yourself from life-long sorrow?"

"No. Not even that—now. I offered her everything; my manhood, my honor, my love, but she cast them aside for a man that can give her none of these." He had grown as pale as death while he was speaking. He looked strangely weak as he sat there in his splendid youth and strength bowed down with the shadow of more than mortal pain.

"Oh, Archie!" whispered the woman at his side. "I am sorry—so sorry. You must try to——"

"I have tried."

"I know it is hard. It is cruel," she said, tenderly, putting one of her hands over his. "Perhaps, at last, it may all come right."

"It will come right if she makes a good wife to the man she marries," said Langstreth, firmly. "And I shall always be a friend to her and—to—him."

"You are a brave man," Mrs. Flodden-Field told him as she poured out another cup of tea.

Nevertheless, that night Langstreth resolved to write to Miss Chesinde.

He had dined alone at his club, avoiding even the men he knew and liked best. The

clatter in the reading-room annoyed him, and he passed into the silence of the writing-room with a sigh of relief.

He sat at the table a long time, with a blank sheet of paper before him and his pen in his hand, considering—not so much at a loss what to say as how to say it.

There was no envy, hatred or malice, nor any uncharitableness in his heart. He could think of Miss Chesinde tenderly, although he thought of her no longer as the woman he loved.

“I have loved you,” he would have said to her, and he would have said nothing else. “I have loved her,” he said to his own heart. And he believed that he should never love any other woman while he lived.

Therefore he wrote:

“I am sorry you did not let me see you once again before you went away. Perhaps you were wise. I am wondering whether you were kind. I have already told Clandon that I consider him the luckiest man in the world, and have shaken his hand. For you I wish every joy.”

He did not post this letter at once. He

acknowledged his weakness in realizing the fact that there was a sense of pleasure in possessing something which bore her name. He read the name over and over again: Miss Viola Chesinde.

It was about eleven o'clock when he decided to go home. In passing through the hall the steward gave him a note which had been left during the day, and at the same time asked if he should mail the letter which he had just written. Again Langstreth read the address: Miss Viola Chesinde.

"No," he said to the servant, "it is not sealed; to-morrow will be time enough. It is for the foreign post."

He went out and began his walk down the avenue slowly. Thoughts chased each other disconnectedly through his brain. Once he passed a man whom he knew and failed to return his greeting, and again when a beggar accosted him he waved his hand absently with the familiar "How are you, old man," and walked on.

His rooms were dark. He struck a match and lighted a lamp upon his writing table. As

the swift glare flooded the room his eyes sought instinctively the address on the letter he had written, and for the first time he remembered the letter which had been given to him at the club.

He broke the seal, and not recognizing the handwriting he turned to the signature before reading the words. It was from Guy Clandon.

A vague sensation of sickness came over him as he held the two letters in his hand; the one to the woman he had loved, and the other from the man who was to be her husband.

Clandon's note was short. It was a request that Langstreth should dine with him on the following Sunday and meet a "jolly crowd."

"My bachelorhood has been pretty game," he wrote, "and dies hard. I've got three months in which to kill and bury it before settling down to domestic respectability."

The tone of the letter grated upon Langstreth. He was not a prig. He had known his share of life and enjoyed its good things. He was not prone to deny himself the luxuries which fell in his path; he was the sort of man whom women admired and for whom some

women had made sacrifices; but those words about bachelorhood and respectability enraged him.

Notwithstanding, he sent an answer to Clandon accepting his invitation.

Before he went to bed he added a few lines to those he had written to Miss Chesinde.

"I have just received a note from Clandon, he dashed off at the foot of the page, "asking me to dine with him on Sunday. And, parenthetically, don't you think you could drop me a few lines? I think, indeed, you owe me that from a strictly conventional point of view as you have never thanked me for the roses I sent you the day I saw you last."

Then he went to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

Guy Clandon's engagement created quite a stir on the matrimonial board. Marriage bonds took a tumble and several débutantes fell off half a dozen points.

Miss Evelyn Thorne felt the reaction the most severely, in as much as her name had been kept before the public constantly in connection with Clandon's.

When the announcement was made, Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne suffered from acute neuralgia for two days and refused to be comforted, even by the latest fad in fashionable physicians who attended her armed with aristocratic anodynes.

On the third day, however, she rose superior to her chagrin and her neuralgia, and went so far as to be able to partake of a mayonnaise of lobster and some dry Pommery for luncheon. But poor Evelyn, who had not suffered—at least from neuralgia—only sniffed delicacies from afar.

Nevertheless, when Mrs. Clandon took Miss Chesinde Europeward using that time-worn excuse that since M. Worth would not come to her, she, like Mohammed, must go to him—then Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne scented danger in the air.

“Now that they have left poor Guy alone,” she said to Evelyn, “we must try to make him at home, my dear. I think I shall give a little dinner, quite a family affair, and ask him to come.”

Accordingly in one of the days that followed she met Clandon somewhere and button-holed him at once.

“Poor boy,” she said to him consolingly, “so they have deserted you. I never pass that great palace of yours without thinking how lonely you must be.”

Guy was not at all lonely for reasons known to himself and some of his friends; but he had been *gâté* from his childhood and he enjoyed being fussed over by Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, who soon convinced him that he was a martyr.

“I call it positively heartless,” she declared. “If *I* were engaged to you, do you suppose I

should run away to Paris? I should run away with *you*."

This was very foxy indeed of Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, and Guy did not lose the opportunity of pressing her gloved hand dexterously, with that little show of secrecy which is dear to the hearts of the mothers of marriageable girls.

"And when are you coming to see us?" she pursued. "Evelyn was saying to-day that you must make our house your home. Can you come to dinner on Sunday night?"

But Sunday was already disposed of. Guy lied bravely and declared he was awfully sorry.

"Ah! *Cela ne fait rien?*" she exclaimed, with a third empire gesture; "*Alors*, come on Saturday; will you come on Saturday at eight?"

Clandon thought vaguely of a little poker party which was under contemplation.

"And after dinner we will have a little poker," cried Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne with clairvoyance born of desperation, and veneering her words with a smile. "We will have a little game of poker in the *fumoir* and a *petit souper* about midnight; will you come?"

Thus it was settled, and Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne went home vaguely conjecturing where she should go to when she died.

"I call it silly," said Evelyn, when her mother told her what she had done. "What is the use of bothering over Guy Clandon now. He is over and done for."

"There is many a slip," she quoted, with an impressive air, as if she were delivering an axiom of the prophets.

"There can't be any slip in this case," said Evelyn.

"The winds and the waves obey Him," replied Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne clerically. "And God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. You are a shorn lamb, my dear. There is always a chance that the ship may go down."

"Mamma! How can you say such things?"

But Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's heart had hardened like the hearts of the Egyptians.

"Well, my dear," she said, "accidents do happen and people are dying every day. If ships must go down I see no harm in backing some particular ship."

This was all that was said upon the subject.

Before many days, however, everybody knew that Mrs. Clandon and Miss Chesinde had arrived safe in London; but Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne still barnacled to hope and began to calculate the possibilities of danger on the return voyage.

CHAPTER V.

On Sunday evening when Langstreth presented himself at the appointed place and hour, an obsequious waiter ushered him into a small ante-chamber situated between two large and brilliantly-lighted rooms. In one of these a table was set for about a dozen people, while from the other proceeded laughter and interrupted music.

A strange sense of unfitness took possession of Langstreth's mind.

Almost immediately Clandon advanced to meet him. He had evidently been drinking and already looked disordered. "How goes it?" he said to his guest and shook his hand unsteadily.

Langstreth, standing before a mirror, was fastening some violets in his coat. "Whom have you dining?" he asked, trying to speak indifferently.

"Pussy Le Clare for one, and a jolly set. They are all clamoring for you."

"Who? Pussy Le Clare?"

"Yes, why not?" asked Clandon, sobering momentarily as Langstreth faced him.

This, then, was what was meant by the death and burial of bachelorhood.

Miss Pussy Le Clare was the bright and shining light at the Casino and appeared nightly before an enthusiastic audience, attired in red tights and diamond butterflies.

"Besides," went on Clandon, "we've got Violet Vardemonde, who has just come over with the London Hilarity Company. She is a screamer."

Some one at that instant began to sing, "For I'm the Only Original Guy," to the apparent enjoyment of the roomful.

"That's she," exclaimed Clandon with enthusiasm.

"She is certainly a screamer," said Langstreth, not moving after his host, who had started to join the revelers.

"Come along," he urged. "You look a regular daisy. We will swing right in."

In the act of swinging Langstreth stopped him.

"I say, Clandon," he began, "I did not quite understand about your party to-night. You know I am not a monk by any means, but this sort of thing does not amuse me. Pussy Le Clare is all very well on the stage, but she can't possibly be charming at dinner. Now, I want you to let me off. No one will miss me, and I should only be a wet blanket on the fun. There are a lot more men in there than—than women, and I should not pull well with the crowd. You understand, I'm sure."

Clandon's mind was never very clear, but Langstreth had stated his case beyond misconception.

"It looks confoundedly odd," said Guy. "Why don't you like Pussy?"

"I don't know her, but that is not the question."

"She is my friend," Clandon averred with determination.

"Perhaps," said Langstreth. "I only hope you will find her so. But I do not care to make her an acquaintance of mine, and I am sorry to find her here to-night."

"You are thinking of Viola Chesinde," said

Guy, as Miss Vardemonde in the next room began to sing "Le petit accident."

"I should find it impossible to think of Miss Chesinde here at all."

"Why don't you call her Viola," said Clandon. "You needn't mind me."

Langstreth colored hotly. "There is no occasion to speak of Miss Chesinde by any name," he replied with emphasis. "And now if you will permit me I will leave you to join your guests." He was angry but controlled himself forcibly.

"Hell!" said Clandon; and turning on his heel he left him alone.

Before Langstreth had closed the door of the smaller room as he made his exit, a loud laugh reached his ears and he knew that those men and women were making coarse jokes at the expense of his manliness, and he smiled scornfully.

Then a small hand touched his arm and a low voice spoke his name; turning, he saw Pussy Le Clare at his side. She was very pretty and she had curved her full red lips into a smile of child-like innocence.

"I am sorry you are going away," she said in a voice whose modulation was delicious. "It seems rather humiliating for—me."

Langstreth could not repress an expression of pity and surprise as he gazed at the quiet, refined-looking woman who stood beside him. Could this be that same creature who disported herself nightly in semi-nudity before an eager-eyed public? Even the dress she wore was simple and unostentatious.

"There is nothing humiliating to you," he assured her as he took off his hat. "The fact is I am out of sorts and I should be out of place. You don't want a skeleton at the feast."

"You don't look much like a skeleton," said the gay little body, laughing admiringly into his blue eyes. "But I did not come to ask you to stay—only to tell you that I am sorry you are going away." She drew from her corsage a tiny handkerchief of cambric and lace, perfuming the air as she waved it to and fro. "See here," she went on suddenly, "don't you want to come to see me some time in my little diggings?"

"You are very good," Langstreth replied uncompromisingly.

"Well," she said, "all right. I live in Fifty-fifth street, West, number — . But I am not — good." A little nervous laugh parted her lips and she raised her eyebrows timidly.

"You are certainly very kind," answered Archie; "and you look awfully good — good enough to eat."

"No," she declared, as she dabbed her small nose with her perfumed bit of lace, "I am not good, but I have stopped all *that* with Clandon."

Langstreth said nothing.

"Perhaps it is silly of me," she went on, almost shyly; "but when I heard that he was going to be married, I told him that everything between us must end. You see I am perfectly able to look after myself, and I won't take his money or his—his love from another woman."

"Then you are good after all," said Archie.

She laughed again, but her eyes did not laugh.

"I love him," she said with an impressiveness which was enhanced by the frivolity of her tone and gesture.

What he would have said to her Langstreth never knew. A babel of voices rose, calling Pussy's name, and with a little *poiquee de main* she left him. Then, just, as he opened the door to depart he heard her explaining to her companions that she had been detained in the ante-chamber searching for her handkerchief.

Langstreth shut the door gently and went out without a sound.

A sickening sense of loneliness came over him—the emptiness of his life. And this must go on forever. There could never be anything else now.

He walked swiftly out into the night air. There was a tender touch of spring in the wind and a soft fragrance. He raised his hat and let the breeze meet his brow. It was like the caress of a friend's hand.

He thought of Viola Chesinde. He thought of her as he had known her in childhood, as she had first budded in womanhood, as he had watched and aided her successes; he remembered her as he had last seen her, and he pictured her radiant in her queenly beauty as she would one day be as the wife of another

man; and in thinking of her thus it was as though she were dead and lost to him.

For the first time in his life he felt like an insignificant creature. He had never felt the lack of wealth before. And yet, for that paltry thing, gold, the woman whom he had loved had betrayed her honor into another man's hand.

He thought of his manhood, his strength, his youth with a scornful smile of positive disdain.

Pussy Le Clare seemed noble in his sight since she could say of a man who was a drunkard and a libertine, a man at whose hand she suffered indignity and shame, yet, "I love him."

She at least was honest in her love, however base and incomprehensible that love might; be in her own fashion also she had proved herself honest to herself in the resignation of that love.

With such thoughts as these the evening wore dinnerlessly away. But it was with stronger cravings of heart than of hunger that, when eleven o'clock struck, he turned aimlessly into the brilliant entrance of Delmonico's.

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, taking supper with

two men young enough to be her sons and wicked enough to be Nero's, caught sight of him as he entered and beckoned him to her. She looked even handsomer than usual, with a vague suspicion of her maid's artianship visible beneath the delicate tissue of her veil.

"Come and sit down," she said as Langstreth bowed over the hand she gave him. "I think you know Mr. Eresby and Regy—yes, of course, all men know each other at their clubs. We have just been to a little French concert at the Casino—such naughty little Sunday songs; and then Regy insisted that we should come here and have a nibble with him."

"Regy" was the son and heir of Orchiltree Dynevor, and Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne had long since discovered in him especial attributes of regard. Of course the Dynevor millions smelled unmistakably of tobacco, but Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne was above such trifles as the smell of tobacco. She lived in an aroma of palm trees and aloes. She perfumed her laces with Lubin's latest extract and swung censers in her drawing-room with the regularity of an acolyte.

Regy welcomed Langstreth with the air of an epicure, and ordered another bottle of champagne. Archie felt as if champagne would choke him, but he sat down, nevertheless, and thanked Dynevor for his hospitality.

"I thought you were dining with Clandon," said Eresby, who always said the wrong thing at the wrong time.

"No," said Langstreth, briefly.

"But Clandon told me you were," he continued. "He told me the whole party."

"He did not prove so confidential in my case," Langstreth answered, giving a vague impression by his tone that the subject was exhausted.

"Company too high," said Eresby, with a wink in the direction of Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne.

"Too low?" suggested Regy Dynevor.

Langstreth made no reply, and turning to Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, inquired after her daughter.

"Poor Evelyn," sighed the shorn lamb's mamma, "poor child, she has gone to Tuxedo, a real duty visit. It was a fine piece of self-

denial, too, for Regy has made up such nice little parties for us which she must miss."

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne had made up nice little parties, too—poker and supper parties; and she had craftily decided that her lamb was just as well off on the whole at Tuxedo, as she would be in Madison Avenue.

"I suppose you have heard from Miss Chesinde," she asked, as some terrapin in small silver sauce-pans made its appearance.

"I hear of her," corrected Langstreth, "that she is well."

"And happy."

"Why not?"

"Why not, indeed," simpered Eresby with a significant grin. "Clandon seems to be able to enjoy himself, eh! Langstreth?"

"I have never known anything about Clandon's amusements," he replied, "and it is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether he enjoys himself or not."

For one moment Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne was seized with a fear that something unpleasant was going to happen. It flashed across her mind that she was in Delmonico's on Sunday

night, a lone woman, with three of the best known men in New York. She felt quite unequal to the emergency, and turned, as a last resource, to Dynevor.

She was instantly relieved. A look of trouble and anxiety was upon Regy's face, but it did not seem to have anything to do with the question of Guy Clandon's sources of amusement. There was a general appearance of uneasiness among the waiters who were in attendance. Dynevor had discovered that something was wrong with the champagne.

The head waiter was summoned and advanced to the table with an air of quiet and unobtrusive rectitude; after a moment he presented Dynevor with the cork and withdrew a few paces. Regy took it—looked at one end attentively, then turned it round and examined the other end. Then with a sigh and a gesture of superb resignation he said:

"I blame no one. It is inexplicable, of course, but let it pass. Take this away and open another bottle at once."

The crisis had passed. Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne drew a long breath of relief, and noth-

ing more was said on the subject until an hour later when the party broke up.

"What is this about Archie Langstreth and Clandon?" she asked, as she reclined luxuriously in Dynevor's coupé en route for home.

Then Regy explained about the dinner party.

"Langstreth poses for Sir Galahad," he declared; "and one doesn't find the Holy Grail while eating canvas-back duck with cocottes."

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne laughed good-naturedly, and presently when they reached the house on Madison Avenue she asked Regy to come in. He had a brandy and soda in a tiny eighteenth century boudoir, and talked a little love in a nineteenth century undertone while his hostess smoked a cigarette on a divan.

Before he went away he kissed her.

"Oh! Regy," she said, flutteringly.

Then he kissed her again.

CHAPTER VII.

When Langstreth's letter was brought to Miss Chesinde, she was alone in her charming little sitting-room at the hotel in Berkeley Square.

She had increased the opulence of her surroundings. She looked essentially rich. She had lost something of her ineffable grace as she had gained her accession; and yet, in her contradictory method of reasoning, she decided that she was pleased that it should be so. She enjoyed the obsequiousness of servants. She gave gold in payment for trifles. She thought no more of asking the price of her purchases than she thought of inquiring the names of persons who served her. Once or twice she had taken pleasure in looking superior in the presence of poverty.

She was selling herself and she knew it; and the thought gratified her that her purchaser should pay dearly for his bargain.

"He shall allow me a hundred thousand a

year," she said to herself, "and I shall spend two hundred thousand."

But when Langstreth's letter came to her, the elation of her mood fell away as mist, and she experienced a sensation as if everything were plated and the wash were wearing off.

She read the short letter slowly; she read it again, smilelessly, and then she put it among her laces in the perfumed recesses of her drawer.

She sat perfectly still for a long time with her face buried in her hands. She could not tell whether her head ached or her heart. It was late, but she hesitated to ring for her maid, enjoying the silence of her seclusion.

Finally, however, her aunt sent to inquire if she were ready.

"Tell Mrs. Clandon," she said, "that I shall be ready in half an hour."

"But we shall be late," cried Mrs. Clandon; coming to her niece's door and knocking faintly.

"Then they will have to wait for us," Miss Chesinde called back. "Do not undervalue yourself, Aunt Edith. If we are worth asking

at all, we are worth waiting for." And with that Mrs. Clandon was fain to be satisfied.

They were bidden to a great dinner. Miss Chesinde's beauty had passed from lip to lip. Her recognition had been royal. The glamour of opulence surrounded her like a halo.

She found servitors on every side, the non-chalance of her manner charming those who before had exacted obeisance.

Soon after the hour appointed for dinner she was ready to leave the hotel. Mrs. Clandon, resplendent in velvet and diamonds, was fussing over the delay.

"What will they think of us?" she asked.

"I don't care in the least what they think," said Miss Chesinde. "They can't think less of us than I do of them." She leaned back in the carriage and drew on her long gloves indolently.

The evening added to Miss Chesinde's triumphs. Lady Sacheverell took upon herself the honor of having discovered a new star in the season's brilliant galaxy. Men clamored for introductions, and went away satisfied if she accorded them a smile.

When they asked her to sing she replied:

"You have Miss Eames; you have Melba and Jean de Reszke; go and hear them."

Later they came to her and said that the heir to a European crown desired her presentation.

"I am just leaving," she answered, raising her eyebrows questioningly. "His Highness must wait."

Nevertheless, although she knew she had scored a success where even recognition is a conquest, she felt no elation in her triumph. Her aunt, who revered the mighty and was prone to bend the knee to princes, ventured a remonstrance.

"Their marquises and their viscounts bore me to death," said Miss Chesinde slowly. "Did you notice the way they all genuflected before Tan-y-Bwllyh? They make anti-Christ of the heir to a Welsh dukedom."

"They are all most kind," said Mrs. Clandon, purring comfortably.

They were being driven home through the night-deserted streets. Miss Chesinde was leaning back among the cushions of the carriage and had drawn off her gloves. In the

intermittent glare of the street lamps the diamonds of the ring which Clandon had given her flashed. She looked at them with a smile of absolute scorn. For an instant the sense of the power of gold sickened her. What did it avail? The recognition of nobles, the pleasures and pursuits of an effete civilization, the paltry bedeckings of wealth. And she was bound to such an existence by a hoop of flaming stones; bound to it forever. She drew the ring from her finger. A sudden rock of the carriage, if she held it carelessly, might throw it from her, and she would be free.

No! She was bound by chains stronger than a ring of brilliant jewels. The luxurious sensuality of her nature held her in a vice. She slipped the hoop of diamonds over her finger again.

"Do you remember those roses that were sent to me, Aunt Edith, the same day that—that Guy and I became engaged?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Clandon, sleepily. "Why?"

"They were sent to me by Archie Langstreth," she explained, "and I have never thanked him for them."

"Dear me, Viola," said her aunt, "any one would suppose roses were diamonds."

"Roses are—roses," declared Miss Chesinde as the carriage drew up at the end of Berkeley Square, and the footman opened the door for them to alight.

Before she shut her eyes that night Miss Chesinde opened her portfolio and determined to write to Langstreth; but on second thoughts she decided to write to Guy. She filled half a sheet with commonplaces, describing some of their occupations and amusements in London, before she made reference to the subject which was upon her mind.

"I hope you have gone back to your gardenias," she wrote, "or even to orchids, at John's suggestion. Please do not wear roses any more, at least not for my sake. Of all flowers they are the most detestable."

The uneasiness of her mood clung to her throughout the night. She fought fitfully with it during her sleep, and her dreams were disturbing and added to her fatigue. In the morning, however, her equanimity returned.

She passed an hour at Redfern's in the hands

of the most distinguished cutters and fitters of the time; she criticised the work mercilessly and tore down conventional fashion for fancies of her own.

Later she went with her aunt to choose a dressing-case for Clandon, whose birthday followed in June.

"I wish the toilet set of gold," she told the clerk; "solid gold throughout and enameled in white. The crest and coat-of-arms must be sunk in lapis-lazuli and the monogram of diamonds and sapphires."

"It will cost—thousands," said the salesman, as he summoned the head of the establishment.

"Perhaps," said Miss Chesinde, indifferently. "I know nothing of the expense of fine workmanship, and little of the value of precious stones."

"Guy never was one of those effeminate natures," ventured Mrs. Clandon.

"I don't know what you mean by effeminate, Aunt Edith. You would hardly call Archie Langstreth effeminate, I think; yet he cares for beautiful things."

"You must get what you please, my dear," said her aunt. "Guy will be sure to value what is your choice."

The question of the dressing-case being settled, they drove down New Bond street, and in turning into Piccadilly Miss Chesinde stopped the carriage.

"There is Mr. Mortayne," she exclaimed, as she motioned to a man who had just bowed. "How do you do?" she said to him, holding out her hand as he came up to them. "We are just going to the Row; will you get in? This is my aunt, Mrs. Clandon. Aunt Edith, Mr. Mortayne knows Guy at home."

Mrs. Clandon supplemented Miss Chesinde's invitation by her own, and Mortayne took his seat opposite them as Viola gave the order to go to the Park.

"And when did you reach London?" she asked. "You are the last person I expected to meet to-day."

"I am the last person you have met to-day," said the newcomer, with an apologetic laugh.

"See here," said Miss Chesinde, "if you are going to make bad jokes I shall be sorry I

stopped the carriage for you, although I will confess to you that I did not know how glad I should be to see you."

"You are very kind," Mortayne answered. "I have only been here four days—or five. I am old-fashioned enough still to like Paris better than London, although the English country is the most charming in the world. I have been traveling in Cornwall and Wales—making my luxurious body-servant quite unhappy by sleeping in desolate inns."

"What a delightful life," murmured Mrs. Clandon, who could not sleep a wink without chloral and a night taper.

"And now tell me all the news," said Mortayne, "All about yourself and everybody at home. How is your beau cavalier?"

Miss Chesinde hesitated an instant. "Oh! Archie, you mean," she said, as they traced their way slowly before Apsley House and turned to the right into the Park gates. He is well, he is always that. He is always everything that a man should be I think."

The Row was crowded. "Come," said Miss Chesinde again. "We must get out. It is

much nicer to walk. Aunt Edith will go back in the carriage and I will show you all the celebrities and all the great personages I know."

They descended from the landau and Mrs. Clandon instructed her niece to bring Mr. Mortayne back to luncheon and then dismissed them with a wave of her lace parasol.

"I *am* glad to see you," exclaimed Miss Chesinde when they were alone. "I want to sit down and talk to you. I have something to tell you."

They found chairs in a secluded by-path, where it was shady and the air full of perfumes.

"Have you heard what is going to happen to me? I am going to be married," she said.

"I never imagined you remaining single."

"Don't joke about it. It is serious."

"Marriage taken seriously is a joke," said Mortayne. "To whom?"

"Well—to Guy Clandon."

"Ah!" said Mortayne, "am I to congratulate you?"

"You know Clandon," replied Miss Chesinde, "therefore you know whether there is cause for

congratulation. I have been congratulating myself, however."

"I think," he said, catching her glance, "that if you will permit me I will wait and congratulate Clandon. There can be no mistake about his good fortune."

"That is very pretty, Mr. Mortayne. But you must not think I am not happy in my—choice."

"You look perfectly happy," he said as he studied her beautiful smileless face.

Some men passed to whom she bowed indifferently. "Marquises and earls," she explained with a shrug of her shoulders. "Their titles weary me. We go to Paris to-morrow or the day following. 'What! in the middle of the season?' Lady Sacheverell asked me. 'Of course,' I said, 'that is the reason I am going.' They talk of their seasons as if they were bulbs."

Mortayne laughed. "By the way, you know I am going to Paris, too," he said.

"I was contemplating asking you to come," replied Miss Chesinde. "I want you to take me about. I want to see—things."

"What things?"

"Oh!—well; things," she answered with an enigma in her smile. "You know Paris?"

"It was my home for years," said Mortayne. "But you know it, too."

"A passing acquaintance," she told him, with a nod of the head. "I know M. Worth. I always shake hands with him in public. He is a great man. If he liked he could invent a fashion of a hump on the back."

"Very well," said Mortayne; "we will go to—to—the Louvre together."

"Oh!—the Louvre!" her lips parted in a smile of irony. "There are other things I want to see—other places to which I want to go."

"Ah! as a married woman Guy Clandon must take you to those."

"It is necessary to be married then; perhaps I shall marry you, Mr. Mortayne."

He bowed in mock deference, murmuring:

"At your service." Then looking at her face he saw a rapid change that had overspread it.

"Tell me; why are you going to marry Clandon?" he asked.

"So that I may see Paris," she declared with a swift challenge in her eyes.

Thus talking, they discovered that it was time for luncheon, and started by Stanhope Gate in the direction of Berkeley Square.

"Sometimes I think," said Miss Chesinde as they turned off Park Lane and passed through Deanery street with its quaint windings and miniature dwellings, "sometimes I believe I could be happier here in one of these little houses than in one of those palace, in Carlton Terrace or Grosvenor Place."

"Now you are pitting the heart against wealth. That is not like you, Miss Chesinde."

"Do you not think me capable of championing love in a cottage to the routing of the British peerage?"

Mortayne was studying her varying moods. "You were not born for economies," he told her.

She laughed lightly, remembering her lavish expenditures. "You may be right," she said. "I dare say I should suffocate in one of these little cages. But it will be an experience I shall never enjoy—because I am going to marry

Guy Clandon and have houses with forty rooms and a hundred servants." She drew a long breath as she spoke, as if she had escaped something that was disagreeable.

They had now entered the pretty, stately square with its sombre mansions and great trees, and presently found themselves in front of the hotel.

Luncheon was waiting for them, and Mrs. Clandon was in her most affable frame of mind. "I knew your mother," she told Mortayne, and thereupon expounded the past as if it were an epic.

"Mr. Mortayne is coming to Paris," announced Miss Chesinde, as the ices were brought on.

"That will be delightful," acquiesced her aunt, who appreciated the acquaintance of a man like Mortayne, who knew every *chef* in Paris and the peculiar delicacy of each *cuisine*. "Delightful, charming," she reiterated, and began to indulge in gastronomic visions of Bignon and Voisin and the Lion d'Or.

Throughout luncheon Miss Chesinde was very gay, and Mortayne found the frequency of her

smile very captivating. She seemed to encompass him with her inexplicable charm. By the time that coffee was served in the drawing-room he began to envy Clandon his good luck and to wonder vaguely why he had never discovered so much that was fascinating in Miss Chesinde before.

Not long afterward Mrs. Clandon retired, pleading fatigue, and they were left alone.

"You may smoke," said Viola, as she led the way out upon a small balcony that overlooked the square. "Men are more at home when they smoke. I have known you a long time, Mr. Mortayne, but I have not known you very well, and I want to know you well."

The afternoon was delightful. The great trees with their fresh spring foliage were whispering in the breeze. "Is not this a convincing proof of the pre-eminence of British conservatism?" asked Miss Chesinde, as she watched the blue swirls of smoke from Mortayne's cigarette ebb and flow on the warm, perfumed air; "these sombre rows of houses, with their dark colored doors, are they not pictures of respectability which ought to make

us, as republicans, blush? Aunt Edith wanted to go to the Victoria or the Savoy. She is not conservative at heart."

"You were right to come here," replied Mortayne. "Those hotels are huge caravansaries. One is numbered, not named. You become a unit, not a personage."

Miss Chesinde laughed. "How well you understand me. We should agree admirably, you and I," she said. "I could not endure being a unit. 'Miss Chesinde rings,' they say when I touch my bell, and at once there is a rush." She laughed again, lowly, conscious that she had constructed this order of things by her lavish method of tipping. A long vista of liveried lackeys bowing before her gratified and appealed to her senses.

"I hope we shall always agree," said Mortayne, discarding his half-smoked cigarette for no reason at all, and reinstating another. He began to admire Miss Chesinde in a new light from the standpoint of her opulence.

"Yes," she said a little absently, "yes, of course, I hope so." Then she paused. "See here, Mr. Mortayne —"

"I am seeing," he said.

"Be serious; I am serious."

"Well?"

She leveled the keen glance of her cool eyes upon his face in a silent gaze. "Why don't you do something for Archie Langstreth? He is your—your friend."

"The dearest friend I have in the world, Miss Chesinde. My affection for him is the one unselfish sentiment in my nature. I sometimes hate my riches because I can not share them with him."

"But why not?"

Mortayne raised his brows. "Because Langstreth is — Langstreth. That is answer enough for us who know him. I gave him handsome presents once—a ring that cost thousands, his library furniture, a hunter with a pedigree. He took them with his open, honest smile which is more thanks than any words could be; he took those things, but when I offered him money—he refused it. That is prejudice, not principle."

"Of course," said Miss Chesinde, "it is pride, and it is nonsense. Archie is *cinq-ue-cento*.

He tries to play Parsifal in opera bouffe time.

"I begged him to come abroad with me," continued Mortayne. "I wanted to go all over the world—to Japan, to Thibet. 'I can not afford it,' he said, and that was the end of it."

"Well, I shall do something for him," asserted Miss Chesinde with determination. "I must wait until I am married, of course; but I shall do something."

"What—take him to Japan?"

She looked up quickly into his face. "Perhaps, even that," she said insolently, with a shrug. "Oh! you understand."

"Miss Chesinde, I am very fond of Langstreth; perhaps you do not know how fond. I have known him a long time, and I think I know what is the dearest wish of his heart. Do you not love him enough to—marry him?"

A faint wave of color flooded her face, making it surpassingly fair. "When a woman loves a man very much," she said slowly, "the kindest thing she can do for him is to marry—his best friend. Oh! are you going, Mr. Mortayne?"

He had made a slight gesture of deprecation, but he had not thought of going away.

"You have so much to do," he said in a tone of apology. "I must have detained you."

"I never have anything to do except what I please."

They left the balcony with its variegated awnings, and re-entered the cool room. Miss Chesinde made no attempt to detain her visitor nor did she essay to sit down.

"Thank you so much for a pleasant morning," said Mortayne, as he held out his hand. "I shall see you in Paris."

"We stop at the Bristol," said Miss Chesinde coldly.

CHAPTER VII.

Valentine Mortayne was the richest man in New York. He had inherited four fortunes during his minority, so that when he came of age he found himself possessed of an annual income amounting to several millions of dollars.

He had a house in Washington Square, a cottage at Newport, an hotel on the Avenue Kleber, a villa at Cannes, and a shooting-box in Scotland—and he did not live in any of them. He said he believed in having a *pied a terre*. But he shut up his houses and went to hotels.

He was known in every city in Europe and in every club. He had traveled in every part of the civilized world, and managed to spend a million a year unostentatiously.

He was not five and thirty years of age, but he stooped slightly, and his dark hair was frosted at the temples, notwithstanding the luxuriance of its growth.

Women, when they were marriageable, thought him handsome. All men liked him.

There was a potent charm in his manner which over-rode a certain effeminacy of bearing. At the same time there was something distinctly manly in his fearless eyes and the complete repose of his nature.

His whole life had been characterized by success. His investments were secure, his property was productive, his name was a synonym for luck. Yet, possessed of everything to make life desirable, he was not content.

In his sitting-room at Claridge's, with the rumble of carriages passing below him on their way to the most fashionable mile in the world, he was contemplating his position. He, Valentine Mortayne, had been snubbed by a woman.

Miss Chesinde's sudden change of manner had affected him strangely. It was as incomprehensible as it had been unexpected. He felt that she had dismissed him from her presence with perfect courtesy, but with undoubted disregard for convention. And he had been obliged to leave her with no further satisfac-

tion than the information that when she was in Paris she stopped, customarily, at the Hotel Bristol; so, also, did a hundred people he knew, the Prince of Wales among them.

He felt less irritated than preplexed although it displeased him that he should not be indifferent both to irritation and perplexity.

In curious sequence of thought Archie Langstreth rose to his mind and he made a sudden resolve to start for America at once. A score of plans presented themselves vividly to his view, a trip to Alaska in his yacht, a tour of the Rockies, a journey to the North Pole.

Having determined on departure he be-thought himself a little ruefully of his dignity, which he decided might suffer were he to allow any change of plan to arise out of Miss Chesinde's nonchalance; and he reverted once more to his original idea of spending a fortnight in Paris. The Grand Prix was excuse enough; and he mentally declared that Miss Chesinde might put up at the Bristol or at any other hotel she chose.

In this frame of mind a letter was brought to him. It was from Miss Chesinde and contained

an enclosed card from Lady Vane-of-Vanstone, requesting his presence that evening in Belgrave Square.

"I got you this invitation," wrote Viola, "hoping that you might have nothing better to do to-night; besides, I thought it would be a good opportunity to tell you where we are to stay in Paris. We are dining at the Bachelors with "my marquis," and shall go on to Lady Vane's soon after eleven. Do come. V. C."

Mortayne rang for his servant and dispatched him with the commands to send a great box of roses to Miss Chesinde. He smiled grimly as he thought of his decision regarding Paris. Could she have forgotten already that she had told him she would be at the Hotel Bristol? He could not determine which disturbed him the more—the insolence of her former behavior or the kindness of her note; but he became aware that he was pleased at the prospect of seeing her again.

Just before midnight he went to Belgrave Square. He wore a white orchid in his button-hole; it was one of the times he looked hand-

some. He was well enough known to be recognized at once.

"They say he owns whole gold mines—miners and all," he heard a celebrated beauty say as he passed her on the stairs.

Lady Vane received him with effusion born of the fact that her daughters were marriageable and the family exchequer low.

"You must let me introduce you to Miss Hamilton Haye," she said, and rushed him off to the beauty on the stairs.

She was very handsome, with a kind of statuesque impassiveness that made him feel as if he had touched something cold. She believed in the popular fallacy that she resembled Madame Recamier, and Mortayne became eminent in her estimation by telling her that it was so.

Thus it was very late before he was able to approach Miss Chesinde.

She was in conversation with Lord Mountcarron. "Here comes a man," she said to him, "who could buy your estates with his income."

"By Jove!" ejaculated his lordship, adjusting his eyeglass.

Mortayne drew nearer. "How do you do, Mountry, old fellow—"

"Hello! Morty, dear boy!" And the two men shook hands enthusiastically.

"You know each other?" asked Miss Chesinde, and discovered that they had been wet-bobs together at Eton, and within a year of each other at King's. "This is my marquis," she said to Mortayne, with a little laugh.

"Oh, no! He is mine;" and at once the two men fell into the easy conversation of reminiscence, which comes to friends at meeting after long separation.

When at last, however, Mortayne found himself alone with Miss Chesinde, Mrs. Clandon had already signified her desire to depart. Side by side they pushed their way down the crowded staircase.

"Did you get my flowers?" asked Mortayne as they came to a momentary halt on the landing. "They were but a poor return for your kindness in sending me your note. Oh! I am afraid you are tired."

She had grown pale suddenly at his words. The vague sweet, stifling scent of roses

seemed to rise up about her. "It is nothing. It is the white glare of the electric lights," she declared, with an effort at gaiety. "Science destroys nature without a scruple. But—Mr. Mortayne—"

The crowd separated them for a moment and her voice reached him faintly.

"Mr. Mortayne," she said again as they were swayed together, "please do not send me roses any more."

"What, then, shall I send?"

A little flush flitted wantonly over her beautiful brow and cheek. "Oh!" she replied with insouciance, "a rope of pearls, perhaps; a house in Belgravia; anything, even bank notes, only not roses. They stifle me. I cannot breathe."

They had reached the door into the street, and there the rush for carriages, the calling of footmen, was amounting almost to tumult.

"Our carriage is stopping the way," whispered Mrs. Clandon, as her footman took her resplendent personage within his liveried charge.

But Miss Chesinde made no haste. She

knew that there was a duchess behind her whose carriage was delayed by her own. "I cannot help it," she said to Mortayne. "I have not that insular prejudice which bows down to strawberry-leaves. I have never hurried in my life—but once, when I tried to read Howells—and I do not think I shall begin now. Her Grace must wait."

She chatted on indolently for a few moments standing beneath the striped awning which was stretched across the pavement, and then she gave her hand to Mortayne, letting her gloved fingers remain for an instant in his palm.

"Good-bye," she said, slowly, with a smile in the depths of her eyes, "or rather *au revoir* and *a bientôt*; for I shall see you in Paris."

In another moment, like a flash of light she was gone, and the duchess in her place stood at his side.

CHAPTER VIII.

Early the following morning Mortayne sent his servant to the hotel in Berkeley Square and learned that Mrs. Clandon and Miss Chesinde would leave for Paris at eleven o'clock. He himself went to Charing Cross and presented himself a few minutes before the time of train-leaving. He found them occupying a saloon-carriage with every accessory to comfort and luxury, and he felt that his contribution of white violets was small.

Miss Chesinde received him with cordiality and went so far as to say that the violets were something of a consolation for the disagreeables attendant on the journey.

Their moments were few, however, and there was scarcely more than a hurried farewell before the train moved slowly out in the direction of Cannon street.

"Mr. Mortayne seems quite devoted," remarked Mrs. Clandon, as they were running

through New Cross, St. John's. "I did not realize that you knew him so well."

To which Miss Chesinde replied that one could make discoveries even in Piccadilly. "I have known him," she added explanatorily, "for years—not very well, I admit, because he is a sort of amateur Stanley. But he is a pal of Archie Langstreth."

"Pal! My dear Viola," condemned Mrs. Clandon, "how do you pick up such expressions?"

"By associating with peers," she replied, as she buried her nose among Mortayne's violets.

"And when is Mr. Langstreth's pal coming to Paris, may I ask?"

"Oh! I am sure I don't know. He will probably take it in en route to Victoria Nyanza."

"Victoria Nyanza! my dear? And who may she be; another of Archie Langstreth's pals? I think it would look well for you to institute a friendship with some of Guy's companions," suggested Guy's mamma with a wave of gloved hands in the direction of Guy's fiancée.

"I think not, Aunt Edith," said Miss Chesinde suavely "At all events I shall not dis-

cover Guy's friends either in Piccadilly or at the sources of the Nile. They have too much to do at home. They have to mix drinks, or superintend faro banks or—dance ballets.”

“Viola!” And as the tidal train was rushing along through the picturesque pastures of Chiselhurst and Sevenoaks, Mrs. Clandon suddenly discovered that already she was beginning “to feel the motion of that horrid channel,” and had recourse at once to her lavender salts, her diluted brandy and the undivided attention of footman and maid.

There was very little further conversation throughout the journey. Miss Chesinde partook of a light luncheon in which cold game, a salad of chicory, and some dry champagne figured conspicuously. La Manche was perfectly calm, but Mrs. Clandon lay in her cabin and declared that she suffered tortures. Early in the afternoon the shores of France smiled upon them, as did also the railway officials when they discovered that they were the “personages who had commanded” a saloon-carriage and a *coupé lit*.

“You are disgustingly well,” snapped poor

Mrs. Clandon as Viola bethought herself once more of the delicacies of the lunch basket.

On their arrival in Paris they went directly to the hotel, leaving their luggage under the skillful manipulation of Vernon and one of the maids.

"Your own rooms," said the manager with suave obsequiousness as they rattled up to the Bristol. They were conducted at once to a luxurious suite overlooking the *Plâce Vendome* and the *rue Castiglione*, and upholstered in yellow damask. Miss Chesinde remembered that damask on every consecutive visit to Paris, since the early days of her orphanhood when Mrs. Clandon had first taken her under her luxurious charge.

With dinner Mrs. Clandon revived and managed to do justice to a cuisine rightfully celebrated. Nevertheless, it was early when she instituted preparations for retiring, remarking to Viola as she went that for once she should have to break her resolution concerning anodynes as her nerves were "all over the place."

When Miss Chesinde went to her bedroom she found Lucie in attendance and everything

arranged as if the hotel had been their permanent abode for years. Upon the dressing-table, which was elaborate with silver and cut glass, lay a little pile of letters and visiting cards.

"Worth has requested your presence to-morrow," said Lucie in reference to one of these missives. "You will have to decide upon the lace for your wedding dress."

"Heavens!" ejaculated Miss Chesinde. "What a hurry they all are in. Any one would suppose I was going to be married in a week. If they do not take care I shall not be married at all."

Lucie forebore a rejoinder. She knew her mistress well enough to understand perfectly well that her heart was not going to the man to whom she had promised her hand. Nevertheless, Lucie appreciated the good things of this world, and she could not deny that the prospect of the Clandon millions was alluring.

While her maid was brushing and braiding her hair, Miss Chesinde, herself, was reading letters. There was one from her friend, the Duchesse de Vent-Fort, and one post-marked New York, which she opened expectantly.

"Now what," she soliloquized, "can Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne have to say to me?" as she discovered that lady's signature at the foot of the delicately perfumed sheet.

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne wrote an exceedingly amusing letter. She discussed all the current topics and told trifling anecdotes of some of their mutual friends, and finally congratulated Miss Chesinde in words which it was hard to believe were studied.

"You flew away so suddenly," she wrote, "that I did not have a chance to tell you how glad I am that you have found your heart's happiness. I can well imagine that Guy Clandon is the most envied man in New York. I have only seen him rarely of late—once or twice, I believe, but I hear of him constantly. I hear, too, that there are jewels worth half a million waiting for you. Archie Langstreth I *do* see often; and when I tell you that he looks pale and careworn, I do not mean that he is less handsome. Evelyn says he is the most beautiful thing in the world; but, then, Evelyn is mediæval in her enthusiasms. Langstreth strolled in to Del's last Sunday night looking

positively like a ghost; he had had nothing to eat, and so I made him sit down and take supper with us. He was to have dined with some of his club 'Johnnies,' I hear, but found the company too mixed. The conversation was as décolleté as the 'ladies,' which is saying a good deal."

Then followed a little further news of a worldly nature and the letter ended.

Miss Chesinde could not sleep. She even bethought herself of her aunt's flacon of chloral, but dismissed the idea. She gave herself up at length as a prey to insomnia and found that having determined upon wakefulness her mind became quiet.

She understood Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's letter from beginning to end. The motives which had prompted it were clear enough. She had already compared the date mentioned in Longstreth's letter, on which he purposed to dine with Clandon, and she had discovered that it corresponded with that Sunday night when he had turned up dinnerless into Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's champagned and tender mercies;

and Miss Chesinde begrudged Archie neither the champagne nor the tenderness.

"So Guy Clandon——" But she dismissed all thought of him. See did not care in the least with whom he dined. He might have an opera-bouffe as an *épergne* if he liked. She knew that at that moment she hated Clandon, but her heart told her that her feeling had in nowise changed since the moment when she had promised to be his wife.

His wife! After all, was it worth the sacrifice?

She began to think of Langstreth, and her heart beat loud in her bosom, beneath its shrouding of perfumed lace. A delicious sensation of repose came upon her at the thought of him—his strength, his beauty and his love. What were all the riches in the world compared to the wealth of his devotion? They might live in Harlem—or in Hoboken. Those names did not fill her with horror now; and the picture of a life such as that with him soothed her to sleep as the contemplation of all her wealth and the luxuries of her existence were unable to do.

But before noon on the following day her mood veered. M. Worth claimed her attention. She chose the point for her wedding dress, and flitted from Félix to Doucet, from Virôl to Pingot, and gave no more thought to Harlem or Hoboken than she did to the mountains of the moon.

The fashionable, frivolous little Duchesse de Vent-Fort took her to the Bois just before sunset and congratulated her enthusiastically upon her engagement.

"He has millions," she declared in soft, purring French, "millions and millions. You ought to be perfectly happy."

It was a radiant day, as only days are radiant in Paris in the spring. Miss Chesinde looked superb in a costume of mauve and sea-green, which the duchess pronounced *ravissante*. A parasol made of lilacs imprisoned in clouds of white lace shaded without shadowing her face.

"I ought to be perfectly happy," she said, slowly, repeating Madame de Vent-Fort's words, "if money can make happiness."

The carriage wheeled to the left from the

Champs-Elyseés, skirting the Arc and down the wide Avenue de Bois. The liveries of the de Vent-Fort were ultra-marine, and people looked and wondered as they passed. The gay little duchesse plumed herself like a bird in the sun, and imagined how that last lovely empress had felt, as she rolled down the same avenue years ago, with the fickle crowd cheering in her name.

"Ma chère," she whispered, as she leaned over and touched Miss Chesinde's hand, "chère, there is nothing but money in the whole world; nothing that counts, I mean. Happiness, my dear? It is as easily bought as jewels in the rue de la Paix."

"The happiness that one can buy with gold," said Miss Chesinde, "is like the jewels in the Palais Royal."

"Ciel!" cried the duchesse, with a little amused laugh. "You are very clever indeed, and you should be clever enough to know that money can buy anything."

"It cannot buy love."

"Love!" she echoed. "Why, my dear, it is a drug on the market. Oh! you delicious inno-

cent, listen. But no matter," she broke off suddenly and leaned back among her cushions, smiling with enigmatic insouciance.

Miss Chesinde looked half-pityingly at the little gorgeous figure of her friend. She knew that Ottilie Branka had sold herself to the old Duc de Vent-Fort as entirely as if she had been a bundle of merchandise.

"Did you ever love?" she asked with a question in eyes and tone alike.

The duchesse laughed gaily as her black stallions rounded the curve to the right of the Café Chinois. "Love!" she exclaimed in her pretty affected English. "Moi? such a question to demand of one who is married."

"My dear Ottilie," said Miss Chesinde, "you need no heroics with me. Monsieur le duc is a good man—but—"

"*Mais!*" Then Madame la duchesse laughed again. "*C'est trop engageant, ça!*" she exclaimed, touching Viola's hand. "You are right; he is a good man. But women do not love good men—I mean *for* that. I liked the de Vent-Fort. It is a great name. They are *hommes de race.*"

"Then you have never loved?" asked Miss Chesinde. She believed in Madame de Vent-Fort's happiness and she was probing to discover her own.

"A hundred times," said Otilie. "I love you!" She paused an instant with fluttering eyelids and then went on rapidly: "Listen, I will tell you. I was the daughter of a Russian noble. I was poor and I loved a poor man. He was an artist but nobody would buy his pictures. If we had married our lives would have been *biffe*. I was not such an idiot as that. For a poor girl to marry a poor man is simply social suicide. So I married the Duc de Vent-Fort, And now Gouache—there you have his name—now he paints his pictures and I buy them."

The glow of the sinking sun seemed to fade from Miss Chesinde's face; she drew a quick breath as if the careless words of her friend had found their sheath in her breast, and she made no reply.

The Allée de Longchamps was crowded. The duchesse bowed gaily on all sides. The carriages moved slowly in double lines, often being forced to come to a complete stop.

At one of these enforced pauses the azure liveries of the de Vent-Fort came in close contact with the violet and silver ones of a woman who looked like the princess of an oriental island.

The duchesse leveled her lorgnette upon her with the merciless criticism of her order, and then with a look of cold disdain she gave the command to her servants to leave the crowded avenue, choosing one of the secluded roads which led indirectly to the *tours des lacs*.

"What a beautiful creature," declared Miss Chesinde, following the violet and silver liveries with her gaze. "She has a face like the Blessed Virgin."

"Oh! it is Madame de Barras," replied her hostess, smiling indulgently. "She is supposed to be the most dangerous woman in Europe. Men have died for her. Her hotel is a palace, they say."

"Who says?"

"Oh! every man. Her suppers have robbed the Jockey Club of some of its *devotés*. Just at present it is Prince Vasahely, the Roumanian ambassador."

"Does one know her?"

Otilie de Vent-Fort shrugged her dainty, chiffoned shoulders, with a smile of indolent suggestiveness. "We do not, my dear," she whispered significantly. "She is not of our *monde*. But our husbands know her, and our sons."

Once again in the broad avenue as it sweeps into the Place de la Concorde they passed the gleaming vision of Madame de Barras, and Miss Chesinde experienced a strange sensation of prescience as the dusky, oriental eyes rested for a moment on her own. But the duchesse raised her brows with vague disdain; she knew perfectly well that men said of her that she was as fascinating and as dangerous as Madame de Barras; she knew that her own ultra-marine liveries and the housing of gold of her Russian stallions were not a shade less conspicuous than those of the other woman; she knew that her own life was as full of diversions and amusements allowed by the code of her grand *monde* as was that led by the other in her smaller world, and she smiled insouciantly with conscious superiority and calm self-complaisance.

Miss Chesinde's mind was not analytical, although it was encompassing. She had not been accustomed to explain riddles, or demonstrate problems, even though she should guess and solve them; nevertheless, for one instant, she classed the two women together as completely as if Ottilies de Vent-Fort were not the wife of a great noble, the daughter of a semi-royal house, and one of the most fashionable women of her time.

They bade each other farewell, and Miss Chesinde stood in the doorway of the hotel and watched the black horses rush across the wooden pavement of the Place Vendome, with the brilliant trappings of the de Vent-Fort changing from silver in the dying twilight into gold in the feverish glare of the newly-lighted street lamps.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Clandon always declared that she was at home in Paris; and, in truth, she gathered about her a charming circle of friends and enjoyed herself immeasurably. She was *esprit de corps* with the Faubourg, and called herself *enbrique* with the *ancienne regime*.

Miss Chesinde, on the contrary was bored to death with the Faubourg. "I do not know the dates of their titles," she said wearily, "nor their order of precedence, and they know nothing else. They live a perpetual minuet. I am sorry for them, and I regret that they have seen the old names of their streets torn down and new ones instituted, but I cannot discuss the diathesis of a society which existed before I was born."

Mrs. Clandon listened with elevated eyebrows and wondered where her niece could have contracted her plebeian taint. So she performed her stately pleasures alone and excused Viola on any plea that came foremost.

When Valentine Mortayne arrived in Paris, he gave as his reason that he wished to witness the Grande Prix, notwithstanding the fact that he had scarcely eaten his dinner when he started in the direction of the Hotel Bristol.

Miss Chesinde was alone when his card was brought to her, but she made no hesitation to receive him.

"My aunt is out," she said as he entered the yellow damask salon, and she gave him her hand in welcome. "She is putting her trust in princes and dining *a l' ancienne regime* in the Faubourg. You have come just in time to save me from a hideous doom. I was going to bed."

They sat down near an open window where the cool night air blew in, and as the light from a shaded lamp fell upon Miss Chesinde's face, Mortayne was struck by an inexplicable change which had come over it since their parting the week before.

An open book lay upon the table and he took it up. "This?" he said in a tone of surprise. "Does Mrs. Clandon leave her poisons uncorked?"

"Oh! it is mine," she said. "Monsieur de' Ame sent it to me. Its stupidity is only relieved by its nastiness."

This, then, was part of the change which had transpired, thought Mortayne. "I wish you would not read such things," he said to her. "The Jesuits of Bavaria have destroyed their Royal House by these methods. They are like the seeds which the Dervishes eat, producing madness and uncontrol."

"I shall not go mad," Miss Chesinde answered with solemn gaiety. "But the books neither interest nor amuse me. Now that you have come you shall be my mentor."

"Guy Clandon must be that."

Miss Chesinde laughed. "Guy," she said, "sends me books compared to which this is pure. He sends them dog-eared with much reading and annotated, and my name in full on the cover."

"Clandon will be here soon; until then, however, I hope you will not read these things. And by that time I shall be gone away."

"Oh! Where are you going?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I am weary of Piccadilly and the boulevards."

She looked at him narrowly. "You have moral dyspepsia," she said. "You need the tonic of unselfishness. The *pate de foie gras* of an effeminate civilization has undermined your mental health. Go home to America and buy a stock farm."

The slow indolence of her criticism annoyed him. "Why should one breed pigs when one has a rose garden to tend?" he asked. "I once saw a violet growing upon the verge of a sewer—but I saw only the violet."

Soon afterward he arose. "I shall see you often, of course, Miss Chesinde," he said, "since I came in order *to* see you."

"To see me, Mr. Mortayne? And the Grand Prix?"

"*Un cheval de bataille*," he told her with a smile. "Will you drive with me to-morrow?"

"At five," she promised. "If you will come at that hour you will be able to see my aunt and I will give you a cup of tea."

When, however, he presented himself the next day, Mrs. Clandon begged to be excused.

"Aunt Edith has one of her neuralgic attacks," Miss Chesinde explained. "But if the truth were known it is that she is manufacturing an escape from an evening at the Comedie Francaise with the de la Valliere. She will not acknowledge that it bores her, so she has to *tirer d' affaire* by base stratagem."

Tea did not detain them long. Miss Chesinde looked surpassingly fair as she presided among the yellow tea-cups, and Mortayne believed her to be the more beautiful in that of all women she was farthest beyond his reach.

They descended the stairs together, and he was pleased at once by the calm judgment which pronounced his horses faultless. The brilliance of the day had drawn crowds into the streets and it was with a sensation of exhilaration that Miss Chesinde felt thousands of eyes riveted upon her in admiration as she passed.

"Why do they look at us like that?" she asked, when, turning into the Bois, they came to a momentary halt and joined the line of carriages progressing slowly down the Allée. Just

as she spoke she heard a woman, who was reclining in a low victoria, say to her companion: "*Chere, regardes, c'est le Roi Americain la!*"

"My question is answered," said Miss Chesinde, smiling. "So they call you *le Roi*; is that because you are so rich?"

"Because my seat of honor is next to the Queen," he replied, with a look of intentional admiration in his eyes. "A true Parisienne is the most ennuyée creature in existence. They have had their kingdoms and their empires and their regencies, and now that they have their republic they dub us princes—creating a mock royalty—as an epitaph to the past."

Miss Chesinde was silent for a moment. The gorgeous pageant of fashion passed unnoticed. She was thinking of the great wealth of the man at her side, of his wealth and power; and she wondered whether she had done well to promise herself to Guy Clandon. To love she gave no more thought than she gave to Saturn's rings. Why should she? Ottilie de Vent-Fort was happy—and love?

"I want you to tell me something," she said

suddenly. "Tell me something about Madame de Barras."

He looked at her narrowly through half-closed lids. "What do you know of her already," he asked.

"That she has the face of a saint."

"Oh! You do not know her story, then?"

Miss Chesinde neither asserted nor denied her ignorance. "Tell it to me," she commanded.

The following moment of silence which fell between them, she broke by adding quickly and with a faint cadence of laughter in her tone: "Oh! You need not be troubled on--on--*that* score, you know."

"I was not hesitating how to begin, but where," said Mortayne. "Do you care for the Allée, or shall we turn off here to the right toward Neuilly? There are ices awaiting us at the Chateau Madrid, and the Hungarian orchestra is there."

"Truly, you deserve your title as king," said Miss Chesinde. "Ices and the Hungarians, by all means."

In the leafy seclusion of the Boute de l'Etoile Mortayne began his story.

"Léonie de Barras—"

"Ah! her name is Léonie?"

Their eyes met in a glance of quick challenge.

"It is. Why?"

"Nothing. I was simply wondering. It is rather a—pretty name. Go on."

"Madame de Barras is a Tunisienne," continued Mortayne, flicking his horses with his whip. "She has driven half the men in Europe mad by her smile. You also have not failed, I see, to notice its charm. When they do not go mad they kill themselves. There was the young Duc de Plusrien, and Valdoraine, of the English embassy, and oh! half a score—shot or drowned."

"What depravity!" declared Miss Chesinde. "Is her charm so irresistible? Does she never spare? Are men insatiate of her beauty? Do they never weary of a lovely mask?"

Mortayne raised his brows.

"Below that mask," he said, "a soul shines. Every man believes—hopes, that he may find it."

"Has no man lifted the mask yet?" she asked, scanning his face with her cool eyes.

"One man—she loved him."

"Ah! she has loved. Well, and what of him?"

Again Mortayne's eyelids closed slightly as he turned a questioning gaze upon her.

"He was young, impassioned. Youth mistakes ecstasy for love. He thought he loved her. She gave all, asking nothing, and at length wearied him."

"The irony of it!" said Miss Chesinde. "She wearied him. Fool! Why did she not marry him?"

"Men do not marry what they can buy, Miss Chesinde. Oh! how pale you are. You have taken this story too much to heart. It is only an episode."

"And honor?"

"As for honor," replied Mortayne with a shrug as he brought his horses skillfully through the arch of the Chateau Madrid, "there is no such thing as honor, nowadays, outside of the Jockey Club."

He pulled up his horses and the groom sprang to their heads. They descended from the high trap, and were shown up a narrow flight of steps out upon a shaded balcony where

a small table was set with delicacies. There were all sorts of frozen fruits; great strawberries stuffed with cream and flavored with Madeira; pomegranates steeped in wine and congealed.

"How delightful," Miss Chesinde declared as she took a seat that overlooked the pretty court-yard where the blue-coated Hungarians were playing one of their erratic melodies in swinging waltz time.

"This concoction I think you will like," said Mortayne, filling her glass with a sparkling liquid like pale amber. "It is made of champagne and Rhine wine and the juice of a cucumber." There were some stephanotis blooms floating on the top. He noticed that her lips had resumed their brilliance and their smile which for a moment had deserted them during the drive.

"I like it," said Miss Chesinde, with the calm criticism of conviction in her tone. She held her half drained glass poised in the air. "I like it. There is something clandestine in its subtlety that makes it delicious."

A wave in her voice drew his eyes to her face.

"What do you mean?"

"I will have some more," she said, giving him her empty glass. "There is something esoteric about it. It is like a masquerade."

"You are not angry with me for bringing you here?" he asked.

She raised the fine thread of her brows.

"Not in the least, Mr. Mortayne. Why should I be angry? I am an American—and nobody will see us."

"You are angry," he said. "You think I have taken a liberty—"

"Why should I not come?" she interrupted. "Madame de Barras comes."

"Madame de Barras!"

"I have discovered her liveries," said Miss Chesinde, waving her parasol of ribbon and lace in the direction of a Victoria that had just entered the enclosure.

"My dear friend, how can you know these people! You should not even have heard of them."

She laughed lightly. "What do you take me for, Mr. Mortayne? Ah! Here is the Roumanian ambassador also."

There was a clatter of hoofs upon the pavement and Prince Vàsahély entered in his curiously built phaeton, which he drove with the careless ease of a man whose life has been too successful for him to appreciate its value.

He sprang from his trap, throwing his reins to the groom, and assisted Madame de Barras to alight. The beautiful oriental gave her hand to him with the unostentatious dignity of an empress and greeted him with a smile. Then, together, they made their way to a veranda that had been reserved for them. As they passed below the balcony here yes met Miss Chesinde's; she saw Mortayne at her side, and her smile deepened.

"I think I must go," said Viola, presently. "Not because the icie are not delicious and the music not alluring, but because we are dining with our bankers, *a la financiere*. They are the only people on earth I ever take any trouble to please. One cannot trifle with the *haut finance* now a days. It has been a charming afternoon and I have enjoyed it. When are you going to show me Paris, Mr. Mortayne?"

"The Louvre?" he asked as he summoned his groom.

"Yes; that." And she laughed gaily. "Will you ask me to dinner to-morrow night, with my aunt, of course? That is not exactly the Louvre, is it? But Bignon or Voisin will do."

They whirled out into the Neuilly road.

"Miss Chesinde," said Mortayne, "you are puzzling me. Do you care for me at all?"

Her face passed rapidly through its changes from amusement to solemnity, from indolence to interest.

"As for that," she said simply and with an almost childish shyness in her tone, "no woman has so many friends that she does not learn to value each and every one of them. You are my friend, Mr. Mortayne."

His answer, coming rapidly, surprised her.

"I do not know. I am not sure. Friendship is so vast one can not tell where it begins or where it ends; at least I can not. It is like a ship at sea trying to make a port at night in a dense mist."

"Why should you wish to know where friendship ends?"

"So as to know where love begins, Miss Chesinde."

His eyes caught the vague unrest of her lips.

"Everything ends easily enough," she said.

"At all events our friendship shall not end, shall it?"

"No, it shall last—until our love begins."

Almost in complete silence they drove toward the Place de l'Etoile, and from there skirting the Arc de Triomphe, they flew along the smooth decline of the Champs Elysées to the Rond-Point.

At the corner of the rue Royal, where the scattered concourse of the traffic of the Place de la Concorde converges into a narrow line, the violet liveries of Madame de Barras again came into view. A faint change of color flashed quickly over Mortayne's face; then, as the beautiful woman rolled swiftly by, Miss Chesinde thought that the flexible mouth curved itself into a smile in which was mingled something of pity and something of scorn.

CHAPTER X.

“Poor Aunt Edith cannot go,” said Miss Chesinde, when Mortayne presented himself the next day at the appointed hour for dining. “She has a real headache this time.”

Mortayne was profuse in his sympathy, but Miss Chesinde cut him short.

“I am sorry because of the headache,” she said, “but for other reasons I am glad. Aunt Edith has crests and quarterings on the brain. She has discovered that we are descended from half the sovereigns of Europe. No, on the whole I am pleased,” she added gaily. “I prefer my dinner served sans sauce *de sang bleu*.”

“Oh, then you will go, notwithstanding?” exclaimed Mortayne. “I was afraid—I thought—perhaps—”

“That I should stay at home with Aunt Edith? I could do nothing; she is surrounded by attendants. She has the last fashionable physician, the newest model medicine and the

latest nasty novel. This evening is yours—and mine.” She paused an instant, drawing on her long tan-colored gloves. “Besides,” she added, “we must make the most of our time; Guy Clandon is coming.”

She then declared herself ready to start and Mortayne, as he helped her into his brougham, felt an odd thrill of guilt take possession of him.

“Not Bignon’s,” she said, “the night is too divine. I should suffocate in a *cabinet particulier*. I have dined there once or twice with—somebody, I forget, and it was horribly hot.”

“Well! Where?”

She laughed. Her red lips parted and showed Mortayne the scarlet tip of her tongue between her teeth. “Oh!” she cried, “I thought you were going to show me the sights of Paris.”

“We cannot dine at the Louvre.”

Her lovely, low laughter went on: “No, we cannot dine there. But we can dine at the Ambassadeurs, on that little balcony. It will be charming to-night with the moonlight and the lanterns.”

Mortayne was well enough known at all

cafés to secure immediate attention. They chose a table at the farther end of the veranda, where they were in semi-seclusion. Below them in the garden, the rows of chairs were filled with men and women smoking, and drinking delicately flavored decoctions of pale hues; and in the distance the stage was visible through the trees, where La Voyante was enacting her spectacle.

It was all so old and yet so novel to Mortayne. He was *l'homme du Monde* to his finger tips. He had known women in all countries and under all conditions. And here was a woman with whom he was dining alone, and yet whom he had never called by her Christian name, and in whose presence he did not light a cigarette without permission. He smiled grimly at the thought now and then.

Miss Chesinde was gayer, more brilliant than ever. Her talk sparkled like wine, and when she laughed she seemed to stir a tiny chime of bells.

"How strange it is," said Mortayne as he dissected a pomegranate; "how strange that we should, at last, have become such good friends.

A chance meeting in Piccadilly, a little walk in the park, a few moments in a crowded drawing-room, a drive to the Madrid—*et maintenant un petit diner a deux!* I had always believed you blasée—sate.

Her lip curled with vague indolence. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "epicures are not gourmands. Because what is paltry has ceased to amuse me, it does not prove that I undervalue the good things of life. One learns the difference between pâté de foie gras and potted liver; and after all *terrapine au medere* is no more indigestible than an oyster stew."

When dinner was finished she said over her coffee: "I want you to take me to the Variétés; they say the piece is—charming."

"Why should I take you?" he asked.

"Why not? I am not your sister."

"No, you are not that."

"I am nobody's sister," she said. "It is only to their sisters that men forbid those things; they take their wives and their—friends."

"You shall go," Mortayne told her, as he despatched an order for a *loge*.

The play was called "Une Vierge ou Rien,"

and depicted the story of a man's difficulties and perplexities to learn whether the woman he loved was worthy to become his wife. From their box, which was well situated, Miss Chesinde was enabled to obtain an unobstructed view of stage and house. Every seat was occupied.

In the loge next to them sat the Roumanian ambassador. Miss Chesinde recognized him at once as the man she had seen the day before with Madame de Barras at the Chateau Madrid. He was alone and seemed greatly amused by the action of the piece.

But to Miss Chesinde it seemed forced and overstrained. The situations were absurd to grotesqueness, and she thought that in the dialogue vulgarity over-rode wit. Once or twice Mortayne laughed, and it surprised her that he should be appreciative.

After one of the bits of repartee which every one applauded she turned round upon him:

"Do you think that is clever?" she asked. "To me it sounded common. It lacked subtlety, which must be the soul of suggestiveness."

"Would you like to go away?"

"Not at all. I wish to see the end. I want to know whether this man marries the woman—whether she is pure or not. But if he really loved her that question would be unconsidered."

"How can purity be unconsidered in the woman one would make a wife?"

"Oh! well," said Miss Chesinde with a shrug, "of course—you are a man."

Presently the ambassador in the next loge was joined by a man whom he rose to welcome and whom he addressed as Prince; and thus becoming host was obliged to turn his attention from the stage to his guest.

Viola, whose seat was nearest them, could hear the conversation distinctly. Once she laughed as an anecdote reached her, and Mortayne, who was following the play, supposed that she was becoming interested in the action.

She suddenly became aware that both the men in the adjoining box had turned their eyes upon her and were discussing her companion.

"He is an American," she heard the Prince say in pretty, mincing French, by which she judged him to be Russian. "He is worth millions. They call him Bon-Roi on the

boulevards, which is an abbreviation for Bonanza King."

Again Miss Chesinde smiled. She wondered vaguely why the management had not commissioned this nobleman to write a play. Then she turned partly away from them, giving them her profile to study with the air of one who throws pennies to beggars.

Simultaneously the act ended in a volley of laughter and applause. The last few lines had scintillated with extravagant suggestiveness.

"I shall not be guilty of throwing stones again. My own house is too transparent," said Mortayne, as the fauteuils began to empty themselves into the foyer and café. "I shall not presume to criticise either you or Clandon for your choice of literature after this."

During the entr'acte he scanned the horseshoe of the house with his opera-glass, pointing out celebrities as his experienced eye made discoveries. But Miss Chesinde replied listlessly; she could catch bits of conversation going on in the loge next to her and had become interested.

"She is beautiful, certainly," she heard the

ambassador say. "He is wonderful, this young American. Millions, my dear prince, can create dynasties and avert wars, but they can not make handsome women."

To which the prince with his insipid drawl replied:

"Dieu! Non; but a man with millions can discover beauty—and buy it. I have an uncle who is a grand duke and a connoisseur. He does not purchase old masters but finds new genius."

"And has he never married, this young Cræsus?" asked the Roumanian.

"Married! and why? He buys women; he does not wed them."

As they rose to leave the box Miss Chesinde turned her indolent gaze upon Mortayne.

"Who are those men?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I scarcely think them Parisians."

Her smile deepened, and she did not withdraw her eyes from their scrutiny of the face of the man at her side. Here was a man whom all men knew; whose fame was world wide; who was rich with kingly wealth; and she

believed at that moment that he loved her as he had never loved any other woman before. The opulence of her being was roused as she contemplated the vista of his life stretching into the golden future. She believed that she had only to reach out her hand to grasp and share that future with him. She wondered whether he, too, thought that he might possess her. There had been a certain note of mastership in his tone of late, a curious familiarity of attention which had flattered her vanity, leaving her dignity of independence upright.

"If I thought he believed he could win me," she said to herself, slowly, "if I thought *that*, he should love me more desperately than he has ever loved and then go empty-handed away. He should know that there is one woman his money can not buy."

And yet she knew she was selling herself less dearly to a man less worthy of love than he. Bah! What had marriage to do with love? Nothing. She was a victim of fate; she had loved once and she should love always, but marriage was another thing. There was no use in the haunting remembrance of Lang-

streth's pleading, honest eyes, in the recollection of the clasp of his strong hand.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Mortayne.

"Of you," she replied uncompromisingly, "and of Guy Clandon and of how rich you both are." Then, after a moment's hesitation, she added, "and of Archie Langstreth."

"We are all equally rich then," said he, "since your thoughts are of us all."

The entr'acte was over and the people began to file back into their places. The two men in the adjoining loge re-entered presently, bringing with them the faint aroma of Turkish tobacco, and also a companion whom the ambassador addressed as M. le Marquis de Brie, but who was called familiarly Bri-Bri by the prince.

Bri-Bri was tall and fair and, with his white flower, reminded Miss Chesinde of Guy Clandon. He had the same sort of pale personality which made him unique without bestowing distinction, and he began relating anecdotes which made his friends laugh.

Miss Chesinde laughed, too, and as she

turned slightly her eyes met those of the new-comer.

"*Sainte Marie Vierge!*" she heard him exclaim in an audible whisper; "this woman here is the talk of all Paris. Have you not seen her? She is the mistress of Valentine Mortayne."

A faint wave of deeper color swept Viola Chesinde's cheek. She did not remove her eyes from Monsieur de Brie's face until he let his own glance fall, and then she turned away indolently.

She wondered whether Mortayne had heard. He had grown intensely pale, but his eyes were fixed with quiet interest upon the stage, where the comedy was unrolling toward its close. The dim thought of how true to life the play was crossed Miss Chesinde's mind, where a short time before she had judged it unreal and absurd. She did not speak again until the last word of the play had been said and the house rose as one man.

Mortayne helped her into her light wrap, and as he did so she noticed that his face was still pale and that his lips wore a look of deter-

mination and energy in place of their complaisance.

As they went out she said to him:

"I did not quite understand what was meant by the last act. Was the woman pure after all?"

"Yes—and no," he told her.

The boulevards were ablaze; the little horse chestnut trees gleamed emerald and white; there was a buzz of enjoyment in the summer night air.

"Do you know M. le Marquis de Brie?" asked Miss Chesinde, opening and shutting her fan.

"I know him," said Mortayne. "He is the best shot with pistols in Europe."

Then the brougham drew up in front of the Bristol and they bade each other good-night.

Sleep had deserted Miss Chesinde. She had felt weary and fatigued before, but when her head was once upon her pillow she could not close her eyes. As a last resort she summoned her maid and had her lights turned up and endeavored to read, but the book was stupid. She decided to write a novel herself and por-

tray a natural woman. The women in books were vapid, puppet-like things, stuffed like dolls with the sawdust of opinionated creators. As for the men, they were all heroes or villains. In real life there were no heroes; and suddenly she began to think of Langstreth.

A sense of repose and rest came to her although she could not sleep. She no longer counted wearily the ticking of the clock or listened for the rattling of a belated fiacre. She could hear Langstreth's low voice, and it seemed to say "Viola! Love!" And her heart beat softly as it whispeard like an echo, "Ah! Love!"

All night long she lay thinking of him, sleeplessly; but so peaceful was her mood that the next day there were no traces of weariness upon her.

Mrs. Clandon had recovered sufficiently to admit her niece into her much medicated presence.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Viola as she entered the room, "it smells like a pharmacy." There were bottles and remedies everywhere.

Her aunt, elaborate in silk and embroidery,

stretched upon a couch among innumerable pillows, smiled slightly as if by doctor's prescription and held out one white, nerveless hand.

"I know, my dear," she replied, having recourse to her silver flacon of eau de cologne. "But when one is ill one tries anything."

"You seem to have tried everything," said Miss Chesinde, looking at some of the labels. "There are remedies for every known and imaginary disease."

"Not remedies—preventives, my dear. It is always well to be on the safe side."

Viola smoothed her aunt's hand. "You dear old goose," she said affectionately, "all you need is cheering up. Let us take a walk in the rue de la Paix and look in at all the shop windows and pretend we are poor. It will be an excitement to feel one can't buy everything one sees."

But the fashionable physician's orders were not to be thus lightly cast aside. Mrs. Clandon declared that her nerves would never submit to be jostled in crowded streets.

"I have just had a telegram from Guy," she said.

The rapid change of subject jarred upon Miss Chesinde.

"Indeed! What is his news?"

"He will be here to-morrow."

"To-morrow," repeated Viola. She felt as if her death warrant were being signed.

"He has been delayed in London," went on Mrs. Clandon. "But I am sure he is most anxious to see you. Guy never does things with unseemly haste."

Just then it became necessary for Mrs. Clandon to partake of one of her numerous restoratives at the hand of her maid, and Miss Chesinde, manufacturing a hurried excuse, kissed her aunt and left the room.

Before noon she was summoned to receive Mortayne. She had not expected him, and yet his arrival caused her no surprise. She gave orders to have him brought to the small sitting-room which formed part of the suite which she, herself, occupied.

She awaited his coming, standing. She was dressed in a white morning-gown, and the delicate silken draperies drifted about her like snow.

As Mortayne was announced she took a step forward to give him his welcome, and then halted suddenly. The look in his face checked her. She knew at once that something had happened.

"The Marquis de Brie is dead," he said, slowly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, as her clasped hands pressed convulsively against her bosom.

"Sit down—there," said Mortayne, approaching her; and when the first shock had passed she remembered that for a brief moment his hand had caressed her shoulder.

"Forgive me for startling you, but I am not a man of many words. He is dead; he has answered his account to me and he has gone to answer all accounts. He died like a man, bravely—as I should hope to die."

Miss Chesinde brushed her brow with her hand as if to clear a mist from her eyes.

"You have risked your life—for me."

"For my honor and for my love."

She rose from her chair and stood back from him.

"And now I must go," he said hastily, as if

to throw a veil over his last words. "I have come to say good-bye."

"You are going—away?"

"Miss Chesinde," he said, "you are the promised wife of another man. Tell me, am I right to go?"

She stood before him in pale, beautiful silence. To Valentine Mortayne, in that hour, his vast wealth and the power of his name meant nothing since she was denied him. There was nothing else in the world worth anything save this one woman who stood before him in her perfect loveliness, and she was as far beyond him as the soul of one dead.

"Yes," she said slowly, "you are right to go."

He left her without a word.

CHAPTER XI.

On the following day Clandon arrived. But Miss Chesinde declared herself too ill to see him. In truth she was ill. She refused to consult a physician, saying that she should be obliged to tell him what was the matter with her before he could give his diagnosis. "They know nothing—those doctors," she told her aunt. "If you tell them you have a fever they prescribe anti-febrine. I shall be my own physician."

Mrs. Clandon considered Viola unkind to refuse to see Guy. "After he has come all this way to see you," she said reproachfully.

"He was not in such haste that he neglected his tailors in London on my account," said Miss Chesinde.

And then Mrs. Clandon told Guy that Viola felt the delay. "She is very fond of you," she said.

All day long Miss Chesinde lay perfectly still. She was happy in her complete repose. She

knew that the time would come when it would be necessary for her to see Guy, but she enjoyed the short term of probation which she ceded to herself.

In the afternoon a great bunch of roses and ribbons came from Clandon. They reminded her of that day when she had promised to be his wife, believing that he had sent those other roses. The remembrance of them was odious to her; the perfume was unbearable, and she commanded Lucie to remove them.

The next morning, however, she decided that her reprieve was over, and she sent for Guy. She knew that when he came to her, and that she should receive his kiss, it would be sin. The memory of that first and last kiss which he had given her on the evening of their betrothal, clung like shame to her lips.

But Clandon was not at his hotel. His servant sent the message that his master had dined out the evening before, and had not returned to his apartments since.

The afternoon arrived, and Miss Chesinde ordered her carriage.

"You will not wait for Guy, then?" asked Mrs. Clandon.

"Wait for him?" Miss Chesinde's eyebrows arched indifferently. "I never wait for men; they wait for me."

The Bois was resplendent. She wondered vaguely why there was misery in the world, when there seemed so much to make happiness; and she smiled compassionately as she saw all eyes, from the greatest to the least, turn toward her as she passed in the pride of her beauty and wealth.

"If they only knew," she said to herself, "if they only knew. Doubtless, the poorest of them is happier than I."

Then her heart told her that her unhappiness must be upon her own head. "You know where an ideal life lies—life with him. But the pomps and glories of the world are too dear to you—dearer than he! You are afraid!"

She *was* afraid. Her heart spoke truly. It gave her keen joy in its throbbing; each pulse thrilled her with ecstasy. She almost comprehended the delirium of martyrdom.

The afternoon passed slowly; the pageant

of brilliant equipages ceased to interest her. "*A l' hotel*," she said to her servants, and her horses were turned with their backs to the setting sun.

In the broad sweeps in front of the Café Chinois the violet and argent liveries of Madame de Barras came into view. Miss Chesinde turned toward them. The black horses dashed by; the beautiful oriental woman, arrayed in purples of richest hues, was leaning back among her cushions—a man sat at her side.

It was Guy Clandon.

Miss Chesinde's face remained perfectly calm. Her delicate color neither faded nor heightened. She felt no anger. She had solved a perplexing riddle and she drew a sigh of relief as he rolled down the broad avenue des Champs Elyseés.

"Guy has been here—but you were out," said Mrs. Clandon in a tone of reproach, when, a little later Viola found her just leaving the hotel to dine with the Princess de l' Ame.

"Yes, I have seen him," she replied.

She was alone, therefore, when late in the

evening Clandon was announced. She had dressed with great care and wore nothing that Guy had given to her. Her hands were jewelless.

"How do you do," she began as her cousin entered. She would have given him her hand, but he tried to embrace her and she stepped back from him. "You shall not kiss me," she said firmly. "All that is at an end."

"Viola!" He stood in the middle of the great yellow room with that uncertain look of one awakened suddenly.

"Sit down, Guy," she said not unkindly. "Now listen."

"Do you mean that you do not love me?"

"I have never loved you," said Miss Chesinde. "Perhaps if I had I should even now be willing to marry you."

He sat down heavily as if a strong hand had pushed him into the chair.

"You will not marry me?" he said accentlessly.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Do you have to ask that? Doubtless you

think I am a fool to throw away such a chance, but it does not give me one pang. I do not mean to be cruel, Guy. I have not exacted much from you, and I never should have done so. I have known you a long time, and I knew what to expect when I promised to become your wife. And, I think, I knew what I owed to you. When a woman has lived twenty-five years she knows what to expect of men. But I will not be humiliated and—and despised."

"Despised—my God!" exclaimed Clandon, as he sprang to his feet. "What do you mean?"

"Do you think I am a fool?" she asked with fine scorn. "Men want to marry saints. I saw you driving with Léonie de Barras to-day. Go and marry *her* if you like."

Her words steadied him; his mind became clear.

"I care nothing for her—nothing. Oh! Viola, if you think that—"

She interrupted him saying:

"I do not think at all. I am absolutely indifferent. You need not deny anything to me, or make any excuse. There is none that can

be made. I have told you that I cannot marry you, and I shall never change that—never!”

“As for marriage,” said Guy, slowly, “you may be right; no, hear me! A man has the privilege of being heard.”

“I will listen.”

“You may be right not to marry me,” he repeated. “We might not have been happy. You might not. But I should not have been unkind to you.”

“Unkind!” Miss Chesinde’s lip curled. “No, I do not think you would have been unkind to me,” she said. “But women do not marry men for kindness. You would not have been true to me; you have not even been true to me now.”

“I have not been true.”

“Well,” she said, “I did not expect your faith, and I should not have demanded it. But I do insist upon an outward semblance of faithfulness. I suppose if I loved you I could forgive even—that; women are made so. But I do not love you.”

“Oh, Viola! I love you! I love you! Forget what you have said; forgive what I have

done! I swear to you to be different—.” He reached out and caught her hand.

She withdrew it quickly, exclaiming:

“No—no! When I have decided I am decided. I do not want your protestations, or your promises. When I marry a man I shall take him without those. If he loves me I shall not need them; if otherwise, I shall not want them.”

“I love you, Viola, I love you!”

“Love,” she said, “is a very different thing from what you feel for me. We will not talk of love, now—or ever.” Then she held out her hand as if to say good-bye.

For the first time the full meaning of her words was borne in upon his bedimmed brain. He was losing her, losing this woman who was fair beyond all other women, whom all men honored and praised, who made his own lot an envied one. He had lived his short life an egotist and a voluptuary; he had denied himself nothing; and now, on the brink of its attainment, the fairest desire of his heart was being snatched away.

“Oh, God! Viola!” he cried, breaking his dazed silence. “I love you!”

Her lifted hand bade him pause. "Listen to me, Guy," she said. "Listen! It is all over, all; try to understand that. And it is better that it should be so. I should not have been true to you, Guy—I mean I should not have been true in heart. I love another man."

They faced each other for a moment in dull muteness.

"Perhaps," said Guy, "it is better. I will go away. Is the man you love Valentine Mortayne?"

The sudden calmness of his voice drew Miss Chesinde's eyes to her cousin's face. The flush had left his brow, even his lips were pale. He looked miserably enfeebled and yet she pitied him.

"Oh, Guy, I am sorry," she exclaimed impulsively, "really, really, I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

"I shall not forgive him."

"Whom?"

"Mortayne," said Clandon in his teeth. "It was he who introduced me to—to Madame de Barras. Oh! I see it all now. He introduced me; it was all planned. What a fool I have

been. That woman loves him, she has loved him always; he is the one man. And I let her cajole and—and flatter me, paid, bribed to do it by him. Oh! God; what a fool.” He covered his face with his hands.

Miss Chesinde shrugged her shoulders. She grew a little paler at his words, and her fingers twitched nervously, but when she spoke her voice was steady and cold.

“As for Mr. Mortayne, it makes no difference to me who loves him or whom he loves. I do not care if I never see him again.”

She turned suddenly and walked to the door, opened it and went out, leaving Clandon alone in the middle of the yellow damask salon.

CHAPTER XII.

When Valentine Mortayne left Miss Chesinde in Paris he regretted, for the space of half a day, that he had not let the Marquis de Brie shoot him through the heart. Everybody would have been happier, he thought, bitterly. But as the days went on he gradually became more reconciled to life, and made the discovery that there were still things worth living for.

In London he found a letter from Langstreth, and at once he turned his face toward his native land. He had not recovered from the wound which Miss Chesinde had caused, but he resolved to be no longer maimed by it. He knew that he loved her, and sometimes he tried to convince himself that she was not wholly indifferent to him; but he was forced to acknowledge that in the matter of encouragement she had given him nothing to remember.

During the long days of his voyage across the Atlantic he reviewed the situation fully.

This he had plenty of time to do, for with the exception of the captain and his own body servant, he spoke to no one throughout the journey. The smoking-room was dense with Jews quarreling over poker chips, and there was not a woman on board worth speaking of, and less still worth speaking to.

Nevertheless, those quiet days on the summer sea were very pleasant ones to Mortayne, and when the Liberty of Bartholdi came into sight he had the satisfaction of calling himself a fool.

He took up his quarters at the Brevoort House, preferring that to the gaunt grandeur of his own establishment in Washington Square.

The general exodus had taken place. All the mighty ones of Israel had migrated to Newport. The closed houses of the avenue stared at him coldly with shuttered windows, as if forgetful of the fact that he had often been a welcomed guest beneath their portals.

New York seemed odious to him. He telegraphed to Newport to have his cottage in readiness to receive him at once, resolving on immediate departure.

In the meantime he went down town, and at half past one was standing in the entrance of Delmonico's trying to manufacture an appetite. But he could not eat. He took a sandwich and then strolled out into the street again, just as a report was started that the board was at fever heat on account of a "corner" in something; and a few men who did not know him and saw him go away lunchless wondered half-pitiously whether "that poor chap was hard hit."

He went back to his hotel and sent a message to Tiffany that he wished to consult with them concerning a wedding present for Miss Chesinde, and at the same time he dispatched a note to Langstreth. Early in the afternoon a deputy from Tiffany presented himself, and he ordered an *épergne* in which jeweled swans floated upon a crystal lake beneath palm trees wrought in gold.

Langstreth was found to be out of town, and Mortayne felt himself doomed to a lonely dinner at Del's. "At any rate it is better than the Union or the Knickerbocker," he soliloquized, as his servant helped him to dress; "for all the

men I like are out of town and the ones I loathe would deluge me with champagne."

"Shall I call a hansom, sir?" asked Lawson, as he fastened a flower in his master's coat. But Mortayne replied that he would walk.

Everything looked dirty in the streets. The dust was thick over everything, and, with a shudder, he wondered what it would be like in August. A huge dray went thundering by laden with long iron rods which dragged over the cobbles with deafening noise, and he made a semi-resolution never to come to New York again.

Within the next block he met Langstreth.

"By Jove! Vally—"

"Archie, dear old boy!"

And they grasped each other's outstretched hands.

This was at Nineteenth street, and Mortayne insisted that Langstreth should go to dinner with him.

"Just as you are," he said, still holding his hand. "You need not make any excuse because I shall not accept any. Wash? Dress? Non-

sense! my boy. You are better looking than any man under any circumstances."

Langstreth attempted no further remonstrance. They turned into Delmonico's and chose a table at an open window on the Fifth avenue side, and Mortayne fell to studying the menu.

"As for me," said Archie, "I like everything. My appetite is cosmopolitan."

So Mortayne ordered a dinner which an epicure would have appreciated, and very soon they drifted into the easy conversation of old friends. Langstreth told all the news that he fancied might be news to Mortayne, but avoided speaking of himself or his own affairs.

"But tell me something about yourself, old fellow. What do I care for all the others? What have you been doing?"

"Oh! I?" said Archie, and laughed.

"Yes, you—never mind! I can soon get it out of Mrs. Flodden-Field. Have you been falling in love?"

"Out of love, I think, Val."

"Perhaps, after all, I have hit the mark," thought Mortayne as he filled their glasses.

"Well," he said aloud, "you must tell me all about it."

"You will be the first to know," answered Langstreth, with an affectionate smile in his honest blue eyes. "Did you see Miss Chesinde while you were in London?"

"Yes—that is, a little. I saw her in Paris. She said something about you—writing to you or hearing from you, or something."

"Oh! did she," said Archie, carelessly. "I am glad she is well. Did she look well?"

"Do you mean handsome?"

"She is always beautiful. I mean did you think she seemed happy?"

"Oh, happy—" replied Mortayne. "Yes; I should say very happy. I believe she has spent twenty thousand on her trousseau."

"She would enjoy that. I don't know what she would do if she were to marry a poor man."

"Make herself miserable—and him, too," said Mortayne in a tone of conviction. "She could endure anything but poverty."

.
It could not have been said of Langstreth

that he had scourged himself on account of Miss Chesinde's choice. He had not once railed against fate, or reproached her. Mrs. Flodden-Field had told him that he was heartless, because in speaking of her he had said that he hoped she would be happy.

"You don't hope that," Mrs. Flodden-Field had replied; "no man living hopes that for the woman he loves who marries another man."

But Archie had insisted that he did hope she would be happy with Clandon.

"I have loved her, loved her devotedly," he said, with great earnestness; but he said nothing about loving her still.

.

The great jug of champagne-cup, with its floating strawberries and lemon discs and mint leaves, soon bridged over the first sensation of distance between Langstreth and Mortayne; and by the time they moved their places into the café to enjoy their coffee and cigarettes, the two years which had separated them vanished in a curling mist of smoke.

Archie explained that he had not as yet

received his friend's note. "I have been in the country to-day," he said, "at Fort Lee."

"Fort Lee!" echoed Mortayne. "Why not the moon?"

He hesitated a moment, and during that moment a slow wave of richer color swept his handsome face. "I'll tell you all about it, Vally," he said. "Promise not to laugh at me."

"I'll weep bitterly if you like."

"It is serious enough I can tell you. Do you remember Pussy Le Clare?"

"Perfectly," answered Mortayne, with a terrible fear in his heart that Archie had been making a fool of himself or was being made a fool of.

"Well," said Langstreth, "she is dying at Fort Lee."

Mortayne could not help thinking that personally he should prefer to hear that she was dying rather than living at Fort Lee, or any other place; but he did not say so, and seeing that Langstreth was in earnest he said nothing at all, and contented himself with calling for another *fine champagne*.

"My own opinion," said Archie again, "is

that she is not dying. But she is very ill at any rate. Of course she has lost her engagement at the Casino."

"Well?" said Mortayne.

"Well, Vally! That's all. I went up to Fort Lee to see what I could do. You see somebody has got to look after her; there are a lot of bills and—and nurses and things. Then she is worrying over—the—the child."

"Child—what child?"

"Clandon's. It will be born in about six months, if she lives."

"Clandon's? Oh, God!" cried Mortayne as he drew his hand across his forehead.

Then Langstreth told the story as far as he knew it; how, when Clandon's engagement had been announced, Pussy Le Clare had thrown him over entirely, and how in his anger and chagrin he had left her with debts which he had contracted himself.

"Great God!" exclaimed Mortayne, "and Miss Chesinde will marry that brute."

"She knows everything," said Langstreth with a hard glitter in his eyes.

"Oh, no, Archie! That is too horrible."

"She knows," he repeated authoritatively. "I have done what I can for this other woman," he went on, as if to dismiss the subject of Miss Chesinde. "If she gets well after the child is born she will be able to find an engagement soon enough, unless she loses her voice. The worst of it is that she is really fond of Clandon."

To Valentine Mortayne, the man of the world, this story sounded like rubbish, and he looked at Langstreth pityingly for an instant. He was prone to quick judgment and he thought he understood the case perfectly. It was only an instant—and he dismissed the first doubt of his friend for his friendship's sake.

"You are a dear, generous old chap," he said affectionately; "and we will see Miss Le Clare through her bad times and get her a new voice if she loses her own."

Langstreth answered him with a smile.

"I hope she will pull round all right. They say it is darkest just before the sun rises—and Vally?"

"Yes."

"You won't say anything about this, will

you? It would only make it harder for—for her.”

“For whom?”

“For Miss Chesinde,” said Archie; “she will have so much to bear.”

Thus the evening passed, and when they separated late that night it was arranged that they should breakfast together.

But Mortayne could not sleep. Visions of Miss Chesinde flaunted themselves before him robbing him of any possibility of repose. The phantasm of the last two months unrolled itself before him. What did it mean? It was with a curious sensation of escape that he counted himself free, and yet he beat himself against the bars of the cage which was closed against him.

Refreshed only by his bath, therefore, he met Langstreth at about ten o'clock on the following day. The two men shook hands warmly and Mortayne led the way to a quiet table in a cool recess where he had ordered breakfast to be served.

“I am going to ask you to do me a favor, Val,” began Langstreth the first thing.

"Nothing I can do for you is a favor, my boy," said Mortayne. "But whatever it is, it is granted; will you begin on the melons or go at once on to the fried sole? There will be kidneys or something later."

Langstreth helped himself to a bit of melon and shook off the chips of ice. "You see it is this way, Vally; I am most awfully hard up," he explained. "My indolent habits and expensive tastes which I inherited from my father cost a great deal more money than I inherited from my mother. Then there are the flowers one has to send to women and one's clubs, and dinners one has to give to other chap's pals because they know somebody one knows, and then, the button-holes and patent leathers and all—well, you know how it is, Val. And somehow this year I'm devilish hard up; too many patent leathers, I suppose.

"Ah! So that is what you have been doing in my absence," said Mortayne, laughing, as he dexterously extricated the spine of a sole. "You have been running into debt for patent leathers; do you want me to take some extra pairs off your hands?"

"I don't wear them on my hands," said Archie with mock solemnity. "And fancy you wearing my boots! You'd be lost in one of them. No, seriously, I want to effect a loan."

"Well, how much?"

"Oh; a thousand."

"On good security?"

"My word."

"I'll let you have five hundred thousand on that, Archie," exclaimed the elder man, holding out his hand to his friend. "I wish we could come to some agreement on that point."

"I am afraid we never can, Val; although I do believe you agree with me in your heart all the same."

But Mortayne declared that Archie was quixotic. "You have mediæval ideas," he told him, "and *fin de siècle* surroundings. You are like the Vatican Hermes set up as a street hydrant; like an ombre of Claude-Lorraine hung in a gallery of realists. You lose everything by misplacement and spoil all the rest by contrast."

"That's all right," said Langstreth, with a laugh. "I love to hear you talk. You give

everything a new flavor; you remind me of the olives they give to the tasters between each wine in the country of Burgundies."

Then some kidneys and an omelette with asparagus tips were brought on and the conversation drifted to other things. The two men arranged to go to Newport together on the following day; and before they separated Langstreth had the cheque for a thousand dollars in his pocket.

That afternoon Mortayne went to Fort Lee. He found it a ghastly place. The only person he saw whom he knew was the foreman of a large "interior decorating" establishment, who had once done some wood-carving in his house in Washington Square. The man bowed condescendingly and pointed out the way to the hotel.

Mortayne asked to see Miss Pussy Le Clare, and sent up his card, on which he had written that he was a friend of Langstreth's. He found two nurses in attendance and a doctor whom he had known in town. He was told that it was impossible for him to see the patient, and he therefore fell into conversation with the physician.

The primary trouble was rheumatism and acute inflammation of the joints. "A confinement in such a case is most dangerous," said the doctor.

"What can anybody do?" asked Mortayne. It seemed a terrible place to be ill and alone. "There must be something to be done. Who is paying for these nurses and—for your services?"

"Oh! Langstreth," replied the physician, indifferently. "He put the whole matter entirely in my hands. I have just this moment received a cheque for a thousand dollars to cover expenses. I hope the—the child will give him no trouble."

A hot wave swept Mortayne's face. "No," he answered, shortly, "I think not." He walked up and down the room with his hands thrust deep into his pockets; then, without another word, he turned to the doctor, shook hands with him and took his leave. He felt as if he had been struck in the face by a friend's hand. Within half an hour he was in the train en route for New York again.

In the same car he discovered Regy Dynevor reeking of Poole and Piccadilly.

"How d' you do," said Regy, languidly, as if he were accustomed to see Mortayne every day of his life. "What in God's name have you been doing in that hole? I have been stopping with the Taylours at Irvington; dull, but respectable. Going to Newport at all?"

"No—yes, that is— Why?" asked Mortayne, as he sat down and began to study Regy's get-up.

"Why? Well, man, Mrs. Thorny Thorne gives a ball on Friday, and there is going to be a duke at it."

"Alive?"

"God! Don't you know what a duke is?"

"I know," said Mortayne, "what several dukes are. I have found them much like other men; some better, some worse. I am going to Newport to-morrow, with Langstreth, but I did not even know that Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne was there, or that she knew any dukes, or gave any balls."

"Aw! Langstreth," drawled Regy, after a pause. "Rum lot; sort of Sir Galahad and John L. Sullivan rolled into one. Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks; won't you have one of mine?"

"What are they? I can't smoke ordinary stuff, you know"

"I did not know," said Mortayne, "but one can always learn something from everybody. This is not ordinary tobacco. Try one and give me your verdict. By the way, who said that about Langstreth?"

"Oh, well, I did," drawled Dynevor, again, as he lighted one of Mortayne's cigarettes. "Not bad, is it?"

"I mean, who said it first?"

But Mr. Reginald Dynevor was proof against such pricks of sarcasm. "It is one of Mrs. Thorny Thorne's jokes," he replied.

Mortayne smiled in silence. He remembered when Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne had written letters to Archie calling him "*Mon Amant*," and asking him to go to St. Augustine with her. "Well," he said, "what do you think of my cigarette?"

"Oh—ah! I had completely forgotten. Yes—good—very fair, indeed," said Dynevor with the air of a connoisseur. His grandfather had laid the basis of his fortune by selling old rags as "genuine plug."

"Thanks," said Valentine Mortayne, grimly; "you ought to know. This tobacco was grown among the hills of Syria. There is only one plantation in the world, and it belongs to me."

"Aw!—splendid!" exclaimed Regy, with a tardy attempt at appreciation. But tobacco being a glass house in his case, he deemed it wiser to refrain from throwing stones, and changed the subject. "So you are going to Newport?" he said. "Jolly place!"

"It's a very beautiful place," said Mortayne.

"Lots of women!"

"Very likely; so there are in Africa."

"You know what I mean. There's no place where you see such a lot of lovely women together."

"The quantity I can believe. I'll give you my opinion as to the quality by and by," said Mortayne, producing his cigar case again.

After a few moments' silence Dynevor vouchsafed the news that Evelyn Thorne was the beauty of the season.

"So Langstreth told me," replied Mortayne.

"Langstreth knows everything; seems to have a way of 'getting there' with the girls."

As Dynevor made this remark he assumed a sort of injured air as if girls, in general, were his particular right. "Why doesn't he marry some one and be done with it?"

"I really can't tell you why. Not for the same reason you don't."

"How much has he got?" asked Regy.

"Money—or muscle?" inquired Mortayne, slowly. "Why don't you ask him?"

Dynevor laughed fatuously. "Everybody says he is hard up," he asserted. "But I don't understand why. He doesn't keep any horses, and he hasn't a valet; and the Lord only knows where he gets his clothes."

Mortayne looked at his companion with the air of a man who foregoes killing a poisonous insect for the sake of not soiling his hands.

As for that, Archie Langstreth is out and out the best dressed man I know," he said uncompromisingly, "and I know the best dressed men all over the world. He looks more thoroughly an aristocrat in his rough tweeds than the rest of us do in our silk-woven evening clothes. He is not dependent either upon valets or gardenias to be a gentleman."

"By Jove!" simpered Regy, with a drawl as long as a royal pedigree.

Mortayne said nothing in return, preferring silence and a cigar.

"I suppose," went on Dynevor again, "that you saw Viola Chesinde in London?"

Mortayne felt inclined to murder him and run the risk of capital punishment.

"Yes, I saw Miss Chesinde," he replied, "and I saw a great deal else, too; Piccadilly for instance, and St. Paul's."

"Did you; oh!" said Dynevor. "Do you know I always expected that Miss Chesinde and Langstreth would make a match of it."

"I hope you do not feel disappointed that your expectations have not been realized."

"Mrs. Thorny Thorne says they will do it yet, now that Langstreth has come into his money," declared Regy.

For the first time in his life Mortayne felt interested in Dynevor's words. "Money!" he repeated, "what money?"

"Well, not much," acknowledged Regy, who spent ten thousand a year at his tailors and haberdashers; "not much, to be sure. About

two hundred thousand, I believe. Some old uncle died in Brazil or somewhere."

Mortayne was completely surprised. To begin with he had never heard that Langstreth had any uncle in Brazil, or anywhere; but that did not astonish him so much as the fact that having come into a fortune, Langstreth should begin at once to borrow money. He had known Archie for years and he had been perfectly well aware that he had been "devilish hard up," as he himself had said, but he would never accept a loan. "Thank you, Vally," he used to say when Mortayne made one of his offers. "Thank you, old fellow; but if I begin like that I shall never end at all. If I can't live on what I have, how can I ever pay you what I owe?" To which his friend would reply that he need not pay. "But that is not borrowing," said Archie, "that's accepting, and I'm not so poor as that in body or soul."

There was not much more conversation between Mortayne and Dynevor, and presently the train ran into the station at Forty-second street and they separated.

Regy, in a high falsetto voice, hailed a han-

som, and Mortayne, with a sigh of relief, started on foot down the avenue.

He was puzzled and disappointed. He smiled a little scornfully to himself as he thought of Pussy Le Clare and her doctor's bills, and that pretty little story about Langstreth's patent leathers.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's duke sank into comparative insignificance when it became generally known in Newport that Mortayne had arrived.

Dukes were all very well, and Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne was a woman prone to reverence the mighty, but she knew that there were thirty dukes in the British peerage, barring Royalty, and she also knew that there was but one Valentine Mortayne in the world. Even Regy Dynevor fell into the background for the first time since Guy Clandon had deserted to the enemy and left poor Evelyn a shorn lamb. Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, confounding Sterne with the prophets in her religious enthusiasm, thought that perhaps this was the "tempered wind."

She lost no time in dispatching one of her aloe-perfumed, rosy-hued and silver-crested notes to Mortayne, at the Casino Club, requesting his presence at the ball which had seemed such a momentous an affair to Reggy Dynevor.

She wrote a very pretty hand and said one or two pleasant things in welcome, and when Mortayne opened the letter as he and Langstreth sat at luncheon, he mentally decided that he had done well to return to his native land. The Chablis he was drinking was good; the filet was done to perfection; the day was divine, there was music in the court-yard of the Casino; and there were lovely women everywhere.

The two men had reached Newport late the evening before, and it was a source of conjecture and amusement to them how any one knew of their arrival.

"I have invitations to half a hundred dinners this month," said Langstreth as he refilled his glass. "The life here has resolved itself into a perpetual *pâté de foie gras* of eating and ennui. I sometimes think that the isolation of a cenobite would be preferable to the indigestion of a cannibal."

Mortayne laughed: "Your alliteration surpasses your casuistry. We are not breakfasting upon epigrams. Here is something better. What do you say to *Cailles de Vigne à la*

Lucullus and another bottle of wine? Pessimism, my dear Archie, is simply another name for liver! By the way, are you going to Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's ball?"

"Oh, yes, I shall go," said Langstreth, "to pay my homage to Miss Evelyn Thorne as the 'reigning beauty'—and to see Mrs. Flodden-Field."

Evelyn Thorne had once declared that Langstreth was her ideal; and her mother had ridiculed the idea and the ideal, and had called Evelyn's enthusiasm mediævalism. Personally Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne thought Langstreth the handsomest man she knew; but then, she was a widow and was worth a million or two, and felt at liberty to indulge in mediæval enthusiasms. Evelyn was too young for idealisms and too poor to be enthusiastic over penniless athletes. That, at least, was the point of view which Evelyn's mamma took.

Nevertheless, when the night of the ball arrived, Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne received Langstreth and Mortayne with equal cordiality, for the moment forgetting her duke.

"Evelyn, my love, this is Mr. Mortayne;"

and then Mortayne conducted the shorn lamb into the maze of the dance.

"You must talk to me," said his hostess to Archie, as fewer guests were announced and she had a breath's space of time left free. "So you have come to Newport again—to see your old friends. I am so glad."

She knew how to look glad, and she curved her delicately carmined lips into a sensuous smile. She would have done a good deal for Langstreth, after her own fashion, but she had no intention of throwing him within the compass of Evelyn's sensitive susceptibilities; to tell the truth, she was honestly sorry that he had turned up again in Newport, although she had contemplated asking him to spend September with her in Lenox, having previously ensconced the shorn lamb within the prosy precincts of her grandmother's domain in Westchester.

Therefore at the end of the waltz, when Mortayne returned Evelyn to her mother's care, that mother was not displeased to see Langstreth's attention called away by the entrance of Mrs. Flodden-Field.

Mrs. Flodden-Field declared that she was too old to dance; which proved her too young to give it up. "No, no," she insisted; "I am too old."

"Too sensible," said Archie. "But give me the next waltz and we will sit it out. Give me two numbers and come on to the piazza."

"The next is the duke's," she replied. "He would never forgive me."

"Never mind—do you care?" asked Langstreth.

"Not in the least. Come along; I know a charming place where there are bamboo chairs and Chinese screens and lanterns."

They walked along the palm-bordered veranda, and came at length to a small, octagonal pagoda; crescent-shaped lanterns looked like miniature moons, and shed a vague radiance over the enticing seclusion.

Mortayne was standing there alone, lighting a cigarette.

Mrs. Flodden-Field shook hands with him cordially. "We have interrupted your smoky solitude," she said, "but we will give you sweet sympathy instead. No, do not throw

away your cigarette. I like it. You and Archie can smoke and I will tell you a bit of news."

They both began to hazard guesses.

"No," she said again, laughing, "it is not an engagement. *Tout au contraire.*"

They had taken seats in a distant, shadowy corner, where only the mournful wail of the violins reached them faintly.

"Oh! tell us please," begged Mortayne. "Birth, marriage, or death?"

"None—*une affaire flambee.*"

There was a moment of silence in which they listened to a sea-gull's cry. Then she went on:

"Viola Chesinde has broken her engagement and is coming home."

Langstreth was perfectly still; but the cigarette fell from between Mortayne's fingers, and he leaned heavily against the back of his chair.

"I only heard to-day," continued Mrs. Flodden-Field. "Viola cabled me from Queens-town. She will be here in a week. Well, Archie?"

"Well!"

"Why don't you say something?"

"What is there to say? Oh, Val! are you—ill?"

"No, not ill," said Mortayne as he got up. "I am tired to death of dancing, that is all. I hear my waltz beginning, and I must go and hunt up my partner. Is it safe to leave you two alone?"

"I am going to make desperate love to Mrs. Flodden-Field," said Langstreth.

"You will have some one else to make love to now," she replied as Mortayne disappeared.

"As for—love," said Archie.

Mrs. Flodden-Field struck him playfully with her fan. "You are not going to make yourself miserable, are you?"

"She did not hesitate to make me miserable," he said.

"Heavens, Archie! Anyway, she has given Clandon up now, and there is only one thing for you to do. You are independent. You said once that she would marry you on ten thousand a year."

"She said so once."

"She will say so again."

"Not to me," replied Langstreth. "At least I shall not ask her."

"Do you mean that?"

"Absolutely! I shall never ask her—or any woman—*that*."

"Then all I can say is that you are—are wicked," declared Mrs. Flodden-Field.

"Wicked?"

"Yes—and ungrateful; ungrateful to me."

"I am not ungrateful," he told her; and as he leaned over and touched her hand she saw for the first time that he was pale. He got up then, and walked once up and down the illuminated balcony. "I am not ungrateful, indeed; I am only unnerved." He pressed his palms against his temples.

"Dear Archie," she said, gently, "we will not talk about it any more. I am stupid, but I have your happiness at heart."

While she spoke a dull pain smote that kind, unselfish heart. She thought for one brief instant of what her own shallow life might have rounded itself into if she had been so blessed as to have won this man's love.

It could not have been said of Flodden-Field

that he actually treated his wife unkindly, or ill-used her, but the ten years of her marriage had been full of degradation and indignity. She had married him during her first season. She gave herself to him in all the freshness of her girlish ideals. Then had followed a terrible awakening; a few months of dazed incredulity, a little while of positive pain—and then resignation. Thus at thirty she was wont to regard her life as past, and it was only in unguarded moments that her heart beat again at the grave of her buried happiness.

Yet, withal, she was very gay. No one ever saw the pall of that dead past. Her laugh was as free as air; her smile was as bright as a summer day. To love she gave no thought, although sometimes, in the presence of an honest, true-hearted man, her smile would become sad without losing its radiance.

She had known Langstreth from his boyhood, and she had loved him as a sister loves, until her unhappy life aged her in her own eyes, and she came to look upon him as a son.

“Now that you have come to Newport,” she said next, “I suppose I shall see something

of you. I have built a new room at Aidenn, and I want you to criticise it. When will you come?"

"Whenever you ask me."

"Must I ask you?" she said smiling. "Next week you will not need an invitation. Viola Chesinde will be with me, you know."

"I know you are the best friend a woman ever had," he told her.

"Or a man either," she added. "I am a good friend to you —"

Their hands met suddenly in the darkness.

Mary Flodden-Field knew well the tender, strengthful clasp, but the chill that lay in his palm startled her.

"My dear friend," she said in a gentle whisper, "you are tired to-night; this sort of thing is wearing you out. Go home and go to bed."

He told her that he had twenty waltzes engaged and showed her a fan which a woman had given him as a hostage.

"Leave them," said Mrs. Flodden-Field. "What do you care. They will forgive you easily enough, *mon ami*. Let me have the fan. I will take it to Geraldine Clytheroe and tell

her that I found it where you left it." She knew that women would pardon Langstreth unto seventy times seven. "Will you go home, now?"

"Unless you promise me every dance and let me take you out to supper," he said.

She laughed gaily. "There would be food for scandal more delicious than Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's delicacies. No, I must obey my social obligation for an hour or two more."

"And what of mine?"

"Oh! You must obey me; that is your only obligation," she declared, just as a man approached, having invaded their seclusion, and claimed a promised dance.

Then she said good-night to Langstreth, who gave her his word that he would go home.

He went slowly back to his rooms. It was not until he was alone that he realized how weary he was of everything except solitude. For once he was glad that Mortayne was not with him.

He sat down near an open window and filled his pipe and lighted it. He held the bowl caressingly as he might hold the hand of a

friend, resting his elbows on the window-sill and looking out into the night.

He could not tell what his feelings were now that he heard that Miss Chesinde was coming home. He should see her; he should hear her voice and catch the splendor of her cool, grey eyes, and, perhaps, breathe the subtle aroma of her beauty—if she were close to him. Was it joy or pain? Should he suffer or delight? He knew that he had loved her, and he had told her of his love—that it was eternal. He believed that he should never love any other woman. But she had been false to him and to herself.

He sat at the open window until the grey dawn flickered palely. He heard the carriages rolling home one after another from the ball, bearing their faded beauties through the ghastly light of early day.

Then the friendly sound of a small coupe met his ears and seemed to bring a new burden of peace to his mind. He recognized it at once as the carriage of Mrs. Flodden-Field. The side lamps burned red in the wan light. Inside he could distinguish the cloud-like film

of lace which she had worn, and for one brief instant he caught the vision of her face resting upon the palm of her hand.

Suddenly a great tranquility came over him. The tortuous skein of his thoughts untangled and stretched before him in a long vista of repose. The soft air of the summer dawn blew in freshly, fanning his cheek and brow. A new day was at hand.

He got up and went to his bedroom. The window blinds were closed and the darkness forced his eyelids to fall over his weary eyes. He tumbled into bed and slept dreamlessly with the soothing roll of a small coupe droning in his ears, and the pale remembrance of a woman's face keeping watch in his mind.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. There was a low hum of heat in the August air. The servant who brought him his breakfast vouchsafed the interesting information that "it was a fine day, sir," and proceeded to arrange his bath.

It was about ten o'clock when Mortayne was ushered into the small room where Langstreth received his guests. "How are you, Vally?"

he called out, between the cascades of water which he threw over himself. "Sit down and make yourself at home; there is a new novel on the table. It is as dull as a *débutante*, and as nasty as an English burlesque."

Mortayne wandered about the room aimlessly, noting the rifles and fishing tackle of the true sportsman. Upon the wall were crossed some long-disused foils, a pair of spurs worn in some forgotten race, boxing gloves and small firearms of all descriptions. In front of a low divan stood a table littered with pipes and cigarettes, the paraphernalia of luxurious siesta. Near a window a writing table, strewn with letters and invitations, gave evidence of favoritism. A few big easy chairs covered in dark leather completed a room that was masculine, only escaping bareness by the multitude of its comforts.

Presently Langstreth appeared from his dressing-room, clad in a loose suit of flannels. He shook hands with Mortayne and proceeded at once to break an egg. "I am as hungry as the proverbial hunter," he said, "and as fit as a king."

Indeed he looked like a king as he stood in the sun-flooded room, crowned with his waving, golden hair. Royalty paled before manhood. Mortayne made obeisance to him as to a sovereign.

He felt effeminate in Langstreth's presence; and this sensation was at once novel and exhilarating to him. He loved the powerful grasp of his hand, the unaffected simplicity of his bearing, the fearlessness which the knowledge of his strength gave him; he loved the tender tones of his voice which he had heard at times raised above the roar of wind and sea; he enjoyed the consciousness of his own insignificance which the magnitude of Langstreth's nature made apparent. He felt toward him something as a woman feels toward the man she loves and whom she knows is strong in his protection of her—that she would sacrifice herself and suffer for him. But Langstreth was as unconscious of this strange magnetism as he was of his beauty and strength which produced it.

He offered his friends a share of his light repast, but Mortayne declared that he had breakfasted already. If the truth had been known he

had eaten nothing. He had sat down before a table groaning with delicacies and had risen with dry lips.

He remained silent in his seat at the window while Langstreth ate his breakfast, then he got up suddenly and went to the mantelpiece where there were a few articles less warlike and less masculine. Among these, in a leathern frame, stood a photograph of Miss Chesinde, and at the foot of the picture was scrawled in bold characters: "*Qui sait ou s'en vont les roses?*"

Mortayne took up the picture and looked at it earnestly. It showed Miss Chesinde in evening dress leaning against an Egyptian screen; there was an Ibis upon one side and the wing of a Sphynx on the other. Her hands were clasped loosely, and although her lips were grave there was an enigmatic smile in her eyes.

"Have you ever sent roses to Miss Chesinde?" he asked as he put the photograph in its place again.

Archie looked up from the cigarette he was choosing. "Yes," he said slowly, "I have sent her roses."

"What do you suppose she did with them?"

"*Qui sait,*" answered Langstreth, indolently, as he lighted his cigarette.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mrs. Flodden-Field had named her place "Aidenn." She had built the house to suit her own fancies and requirements, and she did not care two straws because people called it hideous. To those favored ones to whom she opened her doors it always seemed charming. There was no welcome so cordial, no sympathy so sincere as hers, and people forgot the ungainly excrescences and irregularities of the exterior in the enjoyment of the perfection within.

When Langstreth rode out there a day or two after Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's ball, he did not notice at all that there was a Swiss balcony over a Moorish arch, or that there were Cairene windows with Gothic panes of glass. He did not think of anything except the dainty little woman who stood at the open door smiling her welcome.

"So," she said, "you have come at last. Is it unwomanly of me to tell you that I have been waiting? I think not."

He sprang from his horse and stood at her side, hat in hand, still holding the bridle. "Ah! that was half the pleasure of coming—to know that you were waiting to receive me."

"Did you know it?" she asked, with a fleeting wonder in her eyes. "How well you are looking, Archie."

"I am well. I am always well," he told her, as he surrendered his horse to the care of one of the stable boys. "I was tired that night, but the rest which you enforced pulled me round in no time." But he did not confess that he had sat up through those long hours, wearily, until, in the pale dawn, he had caught the vision of her face, and that not until then had sleep come to him.

Mrs. Flodden-Field led the way into the house. "I must show you my new room," she said. "Somebody told me it looked like a 'junk shop' after a brawl. I call it my Chinoiserie."

Everything was from China. There were objects of beauty and value on every side, and the air was perfumed with the orient. They sat down in huge divan-like chairs, and Mrs. Flodden-Field rang for tea.

"What do you think of it?" she asked.

"I do not think of it," he said simply. "I only think of you."

For a breath's space of time her eyelids trembled; a vague sensation of giddiness came over her; something seemed straining to rupture in her breast. But her serene smile did not fade.

"If you like it," she said with earnestness, "then I am satisfied. I wonder if they think I care for their criticisms."

In her heart she cared for nothing in the world but the happiness of the man at her side. She had not dreamed of his love; no possible future in which her own happiness lay beside that love had ever entered her mind. She had not said to her heart, "it can never be," because she had never dreamed that it might be. Yet she did realize that of all men he alone was the one for whom sin would become sinless, for whom sacrifice would be egotism.

When tea was brought she made room for it upon a little irregular-shaped table which stood near her, and Langstreth watched her as

if she were something which belonged to him and of which he was proud.

"There is nothing," he said, "that gives a man a sense of conscious rectitude so much as this act of tea-drinking in a woman's presence."

"Men, after all, are only children—overgrown," said Mrs. Flodden-Field with a light laugh. "You all need a woman to take care of you."

"Do I look like a child?"

"Oh! I am not speaking of your body. You are Hercules. I am speaking of your—heart."

There was a moment of silence before he replied. "Listen," he said gently, as he reached over and touched her hand. "I will tell you how it is with me. You have known of my love always for—for *her*; you have known because you are a woman and have understood me. At first I did not know it myself, because, I think, when love is very deep it lies hidden out of sight. But when from boy and girl we grew to be man and woman, with other loves around us, then I knew that I loved her greatly, so greatly, that when she left me for that other man she slew

my love with one blow. I had given her my youth and my manhood which I had kept pure for her sake, and she cast them aside. I did not blame her;" he paused and turned his face toward an open window where the sea-breeze blew in, fresh and salt-laden. "But I do blame her now. I forgave her utterly then; it may have been presumption to think I had anything to forgive. She was honest to me, for she made no defense of herself; and she was honest to herself inasmuch as she made no pretense of her love. But now," he continued with slow emphasis, "*now* I do blame her for what she has done. It is dishonest; it—is—"

"Dishonest!" cried Mary Flodden-Field, interrupting him. "You are bold in your denunciations, at least. It is honesty, Archie—and love. She is truer to herself in this than she has ever been. She has given up—everything, and she is coming home to you."

"Clandon is something, perhaps," said Langstreth with a touch of bitterness, "but I think he was not everything even to Miss Chesinde."

"You know what I mean, Archie."

"You mean his wealth and position. Yes,

that was everything to her. But she has not given them up for me. I do not pretend to understand why she has given them up, but, in resigning them, she has thought nothing of me—of my joy or sorrow.”

“She has weighed her future and found it wanting,” said Mrs. Flodden-Field.

“She did not weigh my future,” said Archie. “She knew what her future must be—and mine, before she promised herself to him. She knew that she was condemning me to celibacy and herself to sin.”

“Oh, Archie! I cannot—I will not, listen to you. You shall not say those things. Here is a woman who has made a mistake; a woman who loves you and whom you love, and now when she has found out that she is wrong and is coming back to redeem herself, you set up your cheap arguments against her.”

“She made no mistake,” he said. “But even allowing that, I do not think that she has done right now.”

“What do you think she ought to do? Marry Clandon?”

“Yes.”

"Archie!"

"She had given him her promise."

"But such a man."

"She knew all that."

"No! not that he was a—a drunkard and a libertine," said Mrs. Flodden-Field, her face growing pale with a sense of shame at her own words.

"Yes—that!" declared Langstreth. "She knew everything. He went into her presence while he was drunk on the very day she promised to be his wife. I passed him as he was entering the house—he was reeling."

"Then," said Mrs. Flodden-Field, "we should be thankful that she has seen the light at last, before it was too late."

"No one is more thankful than I," said Archie, "that she should be spared pain."

CHAPTER XV.

On the day after Miss Chesinde's arrival in Newport, Langstreth rode over to Aidenn again. He was not anxious to see her and yet he felt that he could not stay away. He half hoped that she would not be visible, and at the same time the thought gave him a keen sense of disappointment. As he cantered along the ocean-bound road, he repeated to himself twenty times that he was utterly indifferent to the woman he was going to see.

Valentine Mortayne had left Newport on his yacht for a flying visit to Bar Harbor to propitiate an aged aunt who considered herself neglected if he did not sacrifice a fortnight of his time annually to smoking cigarettes on her piazza and listening to her scandals.

Therefore, Langstreth had had time to diagnose his feelings with care, and as he rode along through the beautiful diversified country, first over a smooth beach, then up a rocky in-

cline, he stroked his horse's neck and said half-aloud that he did not love Miss Chesinde.

He had loved her; he did not deny that. And he loved the memory of his love as if it were some dead friend whom he had laid in the grave. His love was dead.

When he reached Mrs. Flodden-Field's villa, he sent his horse to the stable and was informed that Miss Chesinde would receive him. He was shown into the drawing-room, making a mental apology for his riding-breeches and unconventional get-up. On a table was a huge jar full of violet-colored orchids which he recognized at once as having been sent by Mortayne. He knew the room well; he had often sat in its shadowy recesses with Mrs. Flodden-Field, and yet now the atmosphere of the place seemed changed.

As, after a few moments, the rustle of Miss Chesinde's approach met his ears, he felt no shade of nervousness although a slight moisture dampened his brow.

Then, suddenly, he beheld her, coming toward him with both hands outstretched and a glad cry on her lips.

"Oh, Archie!" Then her hands met his, and she became aware of his pallor and of the chill which lay in his palm.

"I hope you are well," he said with slow gravity. "Had you a good voyage?"

She did not know whether to laugh or to cry. She did neither, and only drew back from him as if in pain. She shrugged her shoulders and let her hands fall passively.

"I am always bored to death at sea. I read a dozen novels and injured my eyes. One's maid is an ennuyante traveling companion."

While she spoke all the gladness which had transfigured her face faded, leaving it almost haggard. She sat down and motioned Langstreth to a chair. It was then, as a fuller light fell upon her, that he saw the change which had befallen her. She was not less immeasurably lovely, but she seemed to him to have lost something of youth and something of purity. She was not pale, but her color was neither the flower of health nor the flush of surprise. Her eyes were heavy with darkened lids.

"A good many things have happened since we last saw each other," said Miss Chesinde,

"and yet here we are again, Archie—you and I, unchanged."

"I am afraid we are changed."

She was silent a moment. He was wounding her terribly. She had given so much thought to this first meeting; all those long, dreary days on the sea she had sat patiently brooding on the joy that was to come of it. Yet she felt no anger toward him that when she was baring her breast to him he should stab her mercilessly. She knew that she had caused him intense gain, and she took this hour of her own humiliation and suffering as her just reward.

"I, at least, am the same, Archie."

"Perhaps," he said, "you have had nothing to make you change."

She looked at him enigmatically, then she shrugged her shoulders again.

"Perhaps not. Where is Mr. Mortayne?"

"In Bar Harbor. He hates it there."

"Then why does he go?" she asked quickly.

"He is rich enough to go where he likes; at least, rich enough to avoid going where he does

not like. If I were as rich as that I would buy what I hated and destroy it."

"You would be a tyrant where Mortayne is a protector," said Langstreth.

She raised her eyebrows. "I should not call him either tolerant or forbearing," she replied. "I saw a great deal of him in Paris. They call him Bon-Roy there."

"He told me he saw you; but he did not say 'a great deal.' "

"People's points of view are so different," said Miss Chesinde with a little laugh, which for the first time reminded him of her as he had known her in the past. "What is much to one may be little to another. I should certainly say I saw a great deal of Mr. Mortayne, and I can only take it as a compliment that he does not say the same of me. He has sent me these orchids, violet ones, on account of my name. It is rather pretty, I think—the idea. He gave me roses once, yellow ones, like those you sent me. Do you remember? I told him that of all flowers, I hated yellow roses the most."

"And do you?"

"Do I?" She repeated the two words lowly.

She would have gone to him then and put herself in his arms; she would have rested her head upon his breast; she would have knelt at his feet. "Do I?" she said again, "I love them better than anything—best of all things."

"I will send you some roses," he said. "There is so little that a man can do."

Her hand went to her bosom; the pain in her heart almost made her cry out. She had expected him to do all things for her; at least that one thing that meant all things to her now; to tell her of his love and to take hers. The magnificence of his manhood smote her. And this she had sacrificed, discarded, for that hollow dream of wealth which had destroyed her. Now, he was telling her that he would send her some yellow roses, because there was so little he could do.

"I used to tell you not to send roses—in the old days. Do you remember, Archie?"

"Yes, I remember."

"You have not called me 'Viola' once, yet. Can you not say it now?"

"It seems so long ago. Perhaps that is one of the things I have forgotten."

Her lips curled. "Well, I shall not forbid the roses any more," she said again. "You are richer than you were once; although you still must pay for your patent leathers."

He looked up at her quickly. A sudden irritation swept over him. "You did not tell me you had received a letter from Mortayne."

"I did not deny it, certainly," she replied languidly. "It was a short letter of welcome. In it he happened to mention that he wished he could do something for you; you had so many expenses—so many patent leathers."

"Mortayne has done something for me," said Archie. "He has loaned me a thousand dollars."

"Oh! to buy boots?"

"No, to buy roses."

Miss Chesinde got up and went to the window. Langstreth could not see her face, but the wind from the ocean came in and ruffled her burnished hair, making it look like a halo round the head of a saint.

"Very well," she said, "then I shall expect them. Am I to thank you or Mr. Mortayne for them? I do not want to make another mistake."

"What do you mean?"

"The last roses you sent—oh! I wish you had not sent them," she exclaimed with a vague desperation in tone and gesture. "In my heart I had promised myself to the man who sent them—"

"And then?"

She paused, steadying her voice with a wild hope. "Guy Clandon claimed me," she whispered; "he told me they were from him."

"Oh, God! Viola!" Langstreth stood up and covered his eyes with his hands.

At that moment Mrs. Flodden-Field entered the room; she gave a little startled cry as she came forward.

"My dear Archie," she said, "you are as white as a sheet. These long rides in the sun are not good for you. Come into the smoking-room and have a glass of sherry; you are positively ghastly." Then she turned to the windows where Miss Chesinde stood gazing out upon the sea. "Come, Viola," she continued, "it is time for tea. I have ordered it on the balcony outside the *fumoir*. The view is lovely from there at sunset."

The little veranda was as luxurious as a Turkish bazaar. It was shadowy with blinds made of scented reeds woven in colors and quaint designs. Mrs. Flodden-Field expatiated upon the elysium of a wide divan rendered tempting with pillows, and pushed Langstreth gently into this low resting place.

Very soon the tea was forthcoming, as was also a decanter and a silver casket of cigarettes.

They did not seem inclined to talk; silence is the privilege of friends. There was something soothing in the soft air of the summer twilight.

Before long, however, Langstreth rose to go. "Now," he said, "comes the ennui and etiquette. I am dining to-night with twenty men and women who care nothing for me and for whom I care nothing, and yet we call that sort of thing pleasure. But one hour on your piazza compensates for all the trials of the other twenty-three. Thank you for a charming afternoon." He took Mrs. Flodden-Field's hand as he spoke and bowed low over it.

"You must thank Viola," she said.

"No, I am the grateful one," Miss Chesinde declared smiling. "For Archie has made me forgetful of all the pains of the past in the pleasures of the present."

"That is very pretty, I am sure," said Mrs. Flodden-Field to Langstreth. "What are you going to do in return?"

"I am going to send Miss Chesinde some roses," he replied.

Viola went out on to the broad piazza with him and watched him as he mounted his horse. There was a deference in his bearing toward her that went to her heart like cold steel. He said good-bye smilelessly as he might to a sovereign.

With a subtle sense of clairvoyance she discerned that he was going out of her life as completely as if one of them were upon a death-bed. Then he rode away slowly, and she stood there alone with clasped hands.

The western sky was a lurid blur of clouds—crimson and turquoise and gold, and against this Langstreth and his horse stood out black and clear defined. At his feet lay the glinting

sea—opalesque; the world swam in a yellow haze.

With a sigh Miss Chesinde turned away. The sunlight had faded; the day was done.

CHAPTER XVI.

Langstreth went about like the ghost of himself for the next few days. Something seemed to be the matter with his heart. He lay awake at night and smoked all day and lost interest in everything. He heard from the physician at Fort Lee that Pussy Le Clare was progressing favorably, and that an eminent specialist had declared that her voice was in no permanent danger. Then, a little later, he received a letter from Pussy herself.

"I never can thank you enough for all you have done for me," she wrote, "and indeed the only thanks I can give you is to forget you altogether. It would be dangerous for you to be connected with me in any way at this time. The one thing that troubles me is the thought of the poor little nameless creature which is going to be born to me."

"Never mind that," he wrote in reply. "We will see the 'little creature' through all right. A name isn't everything. I will give it mine, if you like."

That letter from Pussy Le Clare was the one bright spot for Langstreth in the days which followed Miss Chesinde's return. He sent another cheque to the doctor at Fort Lee and instructed him to spare no expense regarding the comfort of his patient. He wrote to Mortayne, also, in Bar Harbor, enclosing a cheque for a thousand dollars. "Thank you so much for your loan," he said; "I find that I can return it now, as I shall buy neither boots nor boutonnières."

He had sent those roses to Miss Chesinde as he had promised, and received a very little note in reply to them; at the same time he had sent some roses to Pussy Le Clare's sick-room and had had no reply. And all the time he felt as if there were something the matter with his heart.

With Miss Chesinde it was almost the same, only she had no letter from Pussy Le Clare to make those following days seem brighter. They seemed dark enough to her, notwithstanding the glitter and glamour of the Newport season. As the rumor of Guy Clandon's return was circulated, she began to ask herself

whether, after all, she had done wisely in severing her bonds; but the consciousness of the possibility of having acted unwisely made the conviction stronger that she had done well.

As a matter of course Langstreth met Miss Chesinde almost every day. He had been called upon to take her out to dinner once or twice, and he had danced with her at balls, but there the obligation had ended. He had even gone so far as to invent an excuse when she had asked him to accompany her on one of her morning rides; and then, the same day, he had met her alone, followed by her groom, and she had smiled and greeted him cordially, overlooking the evident flimsiness of his plea. He knew in his heart that he was not behaving kindly toward her, but, at the same time, he did not quite recognize any reason for being kind. He was beginning to reproach himself for the decadence of his love; he wondered he was quite manly in his treatment of her. Of course, he argued, he did not love her, but that might, perhaps, be beside the question if it were that she loved him. This, Mrs. Flodden-Field assured him, was the case,

"You have no right to make her suffer," she said.

"But she made me suffer."

"Anybody would suppose you were a Corsican and had sworn a vendetta. Have you no forgiveness, Archie?"

"Forgiveness! I would have died for her once," he said, "died for her. Or what is harder still," he added, with grim humor, "I would have worked for her. But because I could not give her those things which she loved,—" he broke off suddenly. He had forgiven her everything, but he could not forget. The wound which she had dealt him had healed, but the scar remained.

Then he decided to forego society. He became blasé. Everything wearied him. He refused all invitations and deserted his clubs. He took long rides in the country alone and spent his evenings in the seclusion of his chambers denying himself to all friends.

Instead of going to bed he sat up in one of his huge easy chairs, smoking innumerable cigarettes. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "it is these cigarettes that have given me this trouble with

my heart." But his pipe made things no better.

He had not seen Miss Chesinde for several days; some man who had intruded himself upon him told him that she was looking faded and worn, and he felt a momentary anger at being called upon for sympathy.

Nevertheless as he sat there alone, blowing blue smoke-rings into the air, Miss Chesinde's face persistently rose before him. Was her smile sad? Were there dark lines beneath her eyes? Did her voice sigh his name?

He knocked the ash from his cigarette and got up; he went to the mantelpiece quickly and took something from the shelf without looking at it. He held it behind his back for an instant and then, opening a drawer in his writing-table, he pushed it in and turned the key.

He returned to his easy chair and threw himself down among its cushions. A sense of rest came over him; a soothing languor filled the air; he was no longer alone. There was another face over there in the picture frame, which, a moment before, he had left empty—a face less lovely, perhaps, but not less lovable. It seemed

to smile upon him with yearning tenderness. That other face with its sphynx-like beauty had vanished, and this warm, living face came in its stead. He could never be alone any more.

.....

He lifted his head from the purple pillow and discovered Mortayne at his side.

"You have been asleep," said Valentine. "I am sorry I waked you. You have even forgotten to smoke."

Langstreth stretched himself like a great dog, roused suddenly. "I must have lost myself for a moment," he said, and then he gave his hand to his friend. "I am glad to see you back. I did not expect you so soon."

Mortayne sat down. "You are as pale as a ghost," he said as the light struck Archie's face, disclosing the hollow circles round his eyes, fatal indices of sleepless nights. "You must stop all these cigarettes, dear boy. I hear you are smoking yourself into your grave."

"Who told you that?"

"Miss Chesinde."

"Oh!—you have seen her."

"No. She wrote to me, thanking me for some flowers—orchids, which I sent her. By the way, Archie, why have you given up patent leathers and boutonnieres?"

"Because patent leathers hurt my feet and the smell of flowers makes me sick."

"It is not the smell of flowers," said Mortayne. "It is society and cigarettes. Your life is all palaver and *pâté de foie gras*; a medley of cotillions and caviare. You dine ninety times a month. This sort of thing is killing you."

"My dear Vally," Langstreth replied as he chose a fresh cigarette, "according to your reasoning I should think death would be preferable to living. I think nobody—I will give you the benefit of a doubt—would resign a dinner to go to my funeral."

"Cynical? Archie; I cannot allow that. I came here to-night to be convinced of philanthropics at your hands. You always act upon me like a mental tonic—a sort of moral quinine. My aunt's scandals, together with la Rochefoucauld and his school, have upset my ethical bases. I need some of your healthy tenets to re-establish my belief in mankind."

"You see it is wiser to train horses and sail cat-boats than to read French philosophers," said Archie. "But I am not sure, however, whether I can help you to a faith in general humanity, for I am beginning to lose my belief in myself."

"Do not let me lose my belief in you, dear old fellow," exclaimed Mortayne, and as he spoke his eyes fell upon that letter from Pussy Le Clare which was lying on the table with the signature exposed. There was a moment of silence. "I hope you haven't anything to worry you," he said, in an altered tone.

"Now that you have come," said Archie, "nothing."

"That is all right, then," replied Mortayne, as he settled himself to his pipe.

And yet it did not seem all right to him; his eyes, half unconsciously, would wander toward that open letter, and from that to Langstreth's face. It could not have been said that at that moment he doubted his friend, but the seed of doubt was sown. His aunt in Bar Harbor had tilled the ground for the sowing. She did not believe in anything, in man least of all. She

had smiled incredulously when Mortayne told her the story of Pussy Le Clare. She said "rubbish!" and looked pityingly at Valentine through her gold-handled lorgnette, and called him a sentimental donkey. But he clung tenaciously to the sentiment. He had always been a little proud of his love for Langstreth, because he knew that in his world such love is looked upon with scorn. He was rich enough to defy scorn.

Still, that story about Pussy Le Clare did seem a little far-fetched. Why should a man from pure disinterested philanthropy desire the well-being of another man's child? Yet Archie had given him his word. "If I were that child's father," he had said, "I would marry Pussy Le Clare to-morrow, even if I were cut by everybody I know on the day after. I would resign from my clubs—but I should be an honest man."

It was horrible to Mortayne that he could doubt, and yet doubt once having risen in his mind he could not crush it down. With a strange sequence of ideas he began to think of Miss Chesinde. He had thought of her almost

incessantly of late, and believed that in her newly acquired freedom she must likewise have had him in her mind.

Had she not said to him on that day when he had gone to her fresh from the punishment of the man whose lips had dishonored her name, had she not said to him, "you are right to go," and he had left her without question.

What question could there be? He had served her at the risk of his own life, and she could give him no reward, being bound by her promise to another man. But she said, "you are right to go;" and why right unless she loved him?

At the thought of her love his temples throbbed. Throughout his luxurious life he had smiled at love, consciencelessly. His loves had not been without spot or blemish, and he had paid for them with a lavish hand. But here was a love which he could not buy.

"Where is that photograph of Miss Chesinde?" he asked, breaking the long silence. "You used to have it in that empty frame."

"Is the frame empty?" exclaimed Langstreth with a start of surprise, as he remembered the

vision of a fair face which had looked at him fondly therefrom not long ago.

Mortayne showed him the vacant glass.

"Oh!" said Archie a little breathlessly, "I have put that picture away. It was not good. I did not—like it."

"I am sorry. I wanted to look at it."

"You can look at her now," Langstreth replied. "We do not perfume our rooms with pastiles when there are roses growing at our window lattice."

Mortayne shrugged his shoulders and stretched out his legs to their full length. "No; but we prick our fingers with the thorns while gathering the roses," he said, indolently, with a yawn. "What do you think I am going to do?"

"Going to bed."

He laughed. "That, of course, when I have finished my pipe. It is something else."

But Archie could not guess. He said it made his head ache.

"Well," said Mortayne, "I am going to ask Miss Chesinde to be my wife."

Perhaps, then, if Langstreth had been stand-

ing he would have reeled; everything about him seemed to fall away suddenly and then become stationary in grotesque positions. His hands clenched the arms of his chair so that the oak creaked.

"Have you nothing to say?" asked Mortayne. He could not see his friend's face, or it would have spoken plainer than all words could have done.

"No, I have nothing to say."

"You can wish me good luck, Archie!" He paused, abruptly, and leaning over touched Langstreth's arm. "I had sometimes fancied there might be something between you—and—Miss Chesinde."

"There never was anything," he told him.

A momentary silence was punctuated by the striking of the clock. It was midnight. Mortayne counted the slow chime. When it was still again, he said quietly: "I believe that she loves me," as he made a flight of smoke-rings in the air.

He believed that she loved him! There seemed to be cannonry sounding in Langstreth's ears. Those words stupefied and benumbed him as

an explosion might have done. He got upon his feet and leaned against the wall; he could not quite distinguish things clearly, but he saw Mortayne's face distinctly as he smoked on in the calm contemplation of his love.

Everything seemed to have come to an end. His cigarette had gone out; he could not hear the ticking of the clock; the lights were dim.

"I am going to bed," he said, as he held out his hand, gropingly. "Finish your smoke. If you want anything ring the bell and my servant will come—there is whisky and soda water there;" he pointed to a small cabinet.

"Are you ill?" asked Mortayne.

Archie muttered some half-audible words of excuse. "Not ill—tired—a headache."

"All right, go to bed then. I shall see you at dinner to-morrow at Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's. You will be better in the morning."

"I hope so. And Vally—"

"Ay?"

"I believe she loves you, too."

Then Langstreth went into his bedroom and shut the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Langstreth waked up the next morning it was with an indescribable sense of relief which he could not explain. He felt as if he had been absolved of a confessed sin; there was an inexplicable consciousness of regained freedom. He ate his breakfast with a palpable enjoyment wholly unproportionate to the simplicity of the repast. Even the usual irksomeness of dressing was reduced to the minimum by his general elation, and shaving proved almost a source of satisfaction.

He went about his rooms touching here and there an article which he valued, with an anxious sort of fondness in the action. He reinstated the photograph of Miss Chesinde to the dignity of its former position. The whole day passed like a dream; the first serious thought took possession of him when he realized, at seven o'clock, that it was time for him to dress himself for dinner at Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's.

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's dinners were very

great affairs. They marked epochs. Besides terrapin and canvasback and the very latest fashionable brand of dry champagne, she always delighted the jaded epicureanism of her guests with such delicacies as a European nobleman, a celebrated beauty, or the newest sensation in the professional world.

The present occasion was intended to be very great indeed, owing to the presence of Miss Chesinde and the Duke of Bryndulas. Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne understood perfectly well how to combine the strawberry leaves of nobility with the laurels of celebrity. It had all been managed easily enough. Dukes dined, presumably, every day, even in England; and in Newport, if any duke were so inclined, he could dine very sumptuously a score of times every day; and the Duke of Bryndulas made no difficulty about accepting Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's hospitality. It was a few minutes after eight when Langstreth entered the great gilded drawing-room where Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, splendid in amber and gold, was receiving her guests with Evelyn at her side. She welcomed Archie very cordially, notwith-

standing the fact of his being a wolf in the very precincts of the sheepfold.

"Ah!" she said, shaking her head so that all her jewels flashed, "you are a renegade. You have deserted us lately. Have you retired to a monastery? Perhaps you are playing Abelard, but where is Heloise?" She let one of her soft, well-modulated laughs break from her and rested her fan of amber-colored plumes against his arm. "You are to take Mrs. Flodden-Field in to dinner," she added with a sigh. "I wanted you myself, but, you know, *les bienséances!*"

New arrivals claimed her attention at that instant and she swept away toward the door.

He became aware that he was standing near Miss Chesinde and that she was holding out her hand. She carried a mass of white jessmine tied together with violet ribbons, and she began to break off some of the fullest sprays. "Stoop down, Archie," she said; "how tall you are. Let me fasten these in your button-hole. You make pigmies of other men."

While he bent over her she let her eyes wander to his face. His head came very near her

own; one of the short crisp waves of his hair almost touched her ear. She could hear his even breathing.

It did not take long. The stems slipped through the button-hole and a pin made the flowers secure. "There!" she said, as she gave him his liberty again.

He thanked her simply.

Then the door opened and the butler announced, "Mr. Valentine Mortayne."

"Oh! he has come," said Viola, without much surprise; and Langstreth answered: "Yes, he has come."

In another minute Mortayne had made his way to Miss Chesinde's side. Archie watched their meeting. There was an easy familiarity in their manner which proclaimed an existing friendship. Paris at once became the topic of their conversation and Langstreth, thus being debarred, turned in search of Mrs. Flodden-Field.

As soon as he saw her, a little flush of memory swept over him, the memory of a tender smile from an empty picture frame. "Oh! how pretty you look," he exclaimed

heartily; "you do not mind my telling you."

"I am glad," she said. "Indeed I thought of you when I chose my gown."

"It is lovely," he told her. "It is my favorite color."

Then dinner was announced and he gave her his arm.

"I hope you are hungry," he said, crossing the oak-paneled hall, which was dim with the shadows of Florentine lamps.

"Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne makes dining not an art, but a virtue," she replied. "Gastronomy is her religion and her chef is her prophet."

The room which they entered was magnificent. The table was a field of shed rose-leaves. Through a jungle of exotics came the rhythm of a Spanish waltz. The light was aplanatic.

Miss Chesinde sat next to Mortayne, and was ready of wit and lavish of smiles. With the champagne the duke became anecdotal and with silent self-congratulation Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne discovered that even Evelyn was forgetting to snub Regy Dynevor.

As for the rest they were affinities—Bertie Girande, who was said to lead *cotillions a prix*

fixe, and Mrs. Tommy Clytheroe, whose name was Geraldine, but who was known to all clubdom as "Jerry," because her husband was called "Hot Tom;" on the other side Miss Ortheris, about whom scandal was rife, and Alec Nevill; farther along sat Mrs. Vincent St. Paul, who had divorced three husbands to increase her dowry of diamonds, and whom a Russian nobleman was trying to persuade into another matrimonial venture; and at the end of the table, where a fresh breeze came in laden with the scent of the sea and the strains of the melody, Mrs. Flodden-Field and Langstreth.

The occasion was undeniably great. The menu was perfect, the wines were beyond criticism. There were jeweled glasses and a desert service of solid gold enameled with the family coat-of-arms.

Later, in the drawing-room, when the men had entered, Miss Chesinde was asked to sing.

Her mood had changed suddenly. "I thought I was asked to dine, not to sing," she said a little disagreeably. However, she turned to Langstreth and bade him come to her. "Will you turn my music?" she asked.

They went to the piano and she sat down. "Do you remember the old songs, Archie, which we used to sing together?"

"Oh! yes, I remember them."

"It seems so long ago."

"It is long ago."

"Well, which shall I sing?"

"Have you no new ones?"

A pained look killed her smile. Her lips became dry and she wet them with the tip of her tongue.

"Yes, I have some new ones."

"Then why not sing one of those, Miss Chesinde?" he replied.

She lifted her hand imperiously. "Archie," she said, "I will not have you call me that; it hurts me. If you do not wish to speak to me, perhaps, then—you might be right. But you can not be right in this—to make me suffer."

"I do not wish to make you suffer."

"Then call me by one of the old names."

"They are waiting for your song," he said helplessly.

"Let them wait. Do you suppose I care? I

did not come here to sing to them, I came to sing to you."

"And I have asked you for a new song."

"Very well," she exclaimed, desperately, "you shall have what you want—anything."

He would have stopped her then; something in her eyes as her lids fell gave him a sense of pain. But already her fingers were upon the keys, and her lips parted in the song.

"We will forget—Ah, yes, forget at last,
Though hearts be sad and eyes with tear-drops wet;
The sunshine and the shadows of the past,
We will forget.

"Our happy hours together were too fleet;
Your words of love that stir me strangely yet,
The clinging arms, the kisses, tender, sweet,
We will forget.

"In future years must the day dawn at last,
When we will meet as e'er we loved we met;
When, lost in Lethe's wave, the happy past
We will forget?

"And yet, Oh, heart of mine, that throbs amiss
With all this weight of sorrow and regret,
All earth—all heaven, is changed because of this—
We will forget."

"Do you like it?" she asked, during the murmured applause.

"Better than the old songs," he said.

"You used to like them, Archie."

"Yes; I know—"

She rose and stood at his side; while she stood there for one brief moment she touched him. He felt the warmth of her nearness; her arm against his arm, her hand against his hand. His eyes fell upon the perfection of her beauty; the fresh aroma of her hair came up to his nostrils. His fingers spread themselves out to clasp her hand, but as they closed she moved away, and his hand shut upon itself like the door of an empty room.

She did not go far—scarcely beyond the length of an arm; but that distance separated them as wide as pole from pole.

"Archie," she said, bridging the parallax with one of her wonderful smiles, "I have something to say to you. Come on to the veranda."

Verandas played important parts in Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's programmes. She always had them arranged with delightful divans in

screened corners; there were little tables with cigarettes and liqueurs, and the light was sifted through rose-colored gourds.

"This is far enough," said Langstreth, when they reached a secluded nook beyond sight or sound of the drawing-room.

"Are you afraid of compromising me?" asked Miss Chesinde, laughing.

"No—of compromising myself."

She ensconced herself upon a low ottoman, among a bank of pillows. The erubescence of the lanterns changed her white draperies into billows of rose capped with lurid gold. She had drawn off her long gloves and the diamonds upon her hands glowed like rubies. The atmosphere was a damask haze.

"Smoke," she commanded.

He took a cigarette and sat down—not very near, nor yet very far from her. "Well, what is it you have to say to me?"

"Suppose," she said, "that I should tell you that I loved you, Archie; what would you do?"

"I should not believe it, for one thing."

She shrugged her shoulders; when she moved, a vague perfume radiated from her.

"Suppose, then, that I should say that I am going to marry you?"

"I should not believe that, either, because you are going to marry Mortayne."

She raised her heavy lids as if the smoke of his cigarette had entered her eyes. She pushed herself more luxuriously among her crimson cushions and lifted her bare arms behind her head.

"And who says so?" she asked.

"Mortayne!"

"Ah! And I?"

"Have you not said so, too? Oh! I do not mean in words. Women speak in other ways."

"You, at least, speak in riddles," she said. Her eyelids had drooped again; her lips were parted in a dreamy smile. "Come here, Archie,—nearer to me, where I can touch you with my hand, so—Now tell me what you mean."

"You know what I mean, Miss Chesinde."

"Tell me."

"The truth?"

"You never lie," she said.

A moment of silence enhanced their seclu-

sion. No sound reached them except the midnight rustle of the drowsy trees.

"Then," said Langstreth slowly, "did you not tell Mortayne that you would marry him on that day when you bade him leave you in Paris, and immediately break your engagement to Clandon?"

"I could have told him of my hate in no other way," she declared. "Your argument is not so Herculean as your imagination."

"If you had hated him you would have let him stay—and you would not have broken your promise."

"Oh, Archie!"

"Well," he asked, "do you hate him?"

"Hate him? No!"

"You see!"

"But that is not saying that I love him?"

"I have said nothing of love. I am speaking of marriage."

Miss Chesinde sat up suddenly; some of her pillows fell to the ground, but they were unnoticed. She extended her palm, open to the man at her side. "Do you believe that I broke

my promise to Clandon in order to marry Valentine Mortayne?"

"Yes," he said, and paused.

Did he believe that? He had almost believed of late that his own treatment of Miss Chesinde was unkind and ungenerous; he had almost questioned the decadence of his love; but whatever he might think of his own case, he knew positively of Mortayne's passion; and he felt that he owed something to his friend.

"Yes," he repeated, quietly, "I believe that you will marry Mortayne."

"That I came home with the intention of marrying him?"

"Yes—*that!*"

She threw herself back among her disordered cushions, and said, with a low, joyless laugh:

"I wonder what you will believe next."

"Perhaps—that you love him."

"Women do not marry the men they love," she said. "It may be that I shall love—you."

"Then your love will be in vain."

She smiled voluptuously. "Oh! you—say—that—now—" There were little soft sighs between her words. "You say—that—now—be—"

cause I am unmarried—and—you—like to simulate—a conscience. But when I am his wife—”

A look of pain scarred Langstreth's face.

“He is my friend,” he said.

“He can not be your friend,” she told him, “if he is my husband.”

“His wife will be my friend.”

“Not if I am that wife, Archie. Listen!” She stretched herself almost at full length on the couch. “Listen,” she said again, in a voice which was heavy with sweetness. “You and I have been lovers always; we shall love each other to the end.”

“I love him.”

She smiled vaguely. “You love me. Do you suppose I do not see it in your eyes? Oh! I know.” She leaned over and took hold of his hand; the tips of her fingers crept about his outspread palm, thrilling him. A mist seemed to rise making the atmosphere dense and warm, a subtle perfume issued out upon the air. He felt numb; with a half suppressed cry he sprang to his feet. Miss Chesinde's hand fell back from his and clasped itself with her own; at the same instant Mortayne appeared.

"I have been looking for you everywhere," he said; "at least, everywhere but here. Do you think you are treating us fairly? They are clamoring for you to amuse them."

"We are not even amusing ourselves," said Miss Chesinde, indolently. "Mr. Langstreth is an advocate of social gymnastics. He has been trying to convince me that wives should love their husbands."

Mortayne laughed. "Inside," he said, "in the drawing-room, they are trying to convince each other that wives should love some one else's husband. It is an easier task. Oh! are you going away, Archie?"

Langstreth had moved somewhat apart and was standing in a shadow. "I am going to talk to Mrs. Flodden-Field," he said.

"More society athletics?" asked Miss Chesinde.

"No—æsthetics," he told her, as he waved them a farewell with his hand.

When his footsteps had died away round the corner of the piazza, Mortayne took his seat at Miss Chesinde's side.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

She raised her fine brows. "You ask me that? Do you not remember that I read books by M. Catulle Mendés and go to see *risque* French comedies?"

"I wish you would not talk of those things."

"Oh!" she exclaimed with petulance. "You are always thinking of *les convenances*. What shall we talk of, then?"

"Of love."

If those words gave her any surprise she did not show it; perhaps a deeper color flushed her cheek, a fuller violet filled her eyes.

"Miss Chesinde," he said, "I love you. I think you have known that a long time, and you have been very kind. You did the kindest thing a woman can do when you bade me leave you. I had not, then, the right to ask you for your love, and you did not wish to listen to the avowal of mine. But, now I have the right to speak. I have never asked any woman to be—my wife; will you be that to me?"

He spoke slowly, and although they were alone, with nothing but a stretch of sea and shore about them, he made no movement to touch her hand.

She did not speak at once; a hundred memories crowded her brain as the wind does a reefless sail; the scent of roses mingled with the salt-laden air of the sea; the sighing of the breeze through a somber London square; the vision of the gay little Duchesse de Vent-Fort; the rhythm of the Hungarian waltz; a beautiful oriental woman arrayed violet d'argent; a few words whispered by the Marquis de Brie; and circling through and between and around these, the pale, passionless face of the man at her side.

Mortayne, misinterpreting her silence, went on: "I know, Miss Chesinde," he said, "that you are a woman of the world. You have weighed the price of one man's love and found it wanting. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, and I have seen many beautiful women. Women sell themselves as dearly as they can; it is their privilege." He paused, watching her intently, with a manner earnest but not eager. "I can offer as much, perhaps, as any man in the world."

"You should not judge me like that, Mr. Mortayne. At least you should not misjudge yourself."

"I am not judging you. I am only using the right of every man to advance his title to regard."

"Is not love enough?"

"If there is enough love."

"Love is all, or nothing," said Miss Chesinde, a little bitterly, remembering her own love. She knew in her heart at that moment that she should marry Mortayne; it seemed as if she had known it always. Her fair face became touched with a glow of color like a pearl held in sunset light. The old opulent luxury of her nature returned to her. She had delighted to contemplate the vista of her future and the vastness of her wealth as Clandon's wife, and now, at her side, was a man who could quadruple that wealth and lay it at her feet.

Mortayne, waiting for her reply, turned his face into the darkness and caught the cool breath of the breeze as it came up over the water. He was perfectly honest to her and to himself. He had asked her to be his wife, designing to possess her wholly. He paid for love as he paid for other luxuries. Marriage was the only price he could offer to Miss Ches-

inde, and he offered it very much as he had written a cheque, once, for a fabulous sum to acquire a jewel. He waited for her decision as a prisoner in the dock waits for the return of the jury.

She had said that love must be all—or nothing. She confronted him with a swift movement and held out her hands to him.

“I will marry you,” she said, simply.

He enfolded her in his arms but she forbade him the rapture of her lips.

When, a few minutes later, they went back into the brilliance of the drawing-room, some of the guests were preparing for departure.

Mrs. Flodden-Field was standing beneath the crystal chandelier talking to Langstreth, when Miss Chesinde joined them.

“I have something to tell you,” she said, softly. “I am engaged to marry Mr. Mortayne.” She gave a hand to each of them, with gay enthusiasm; her manner was full of ease and grace, and her smile was wonderful to see. Then, with a little, low, rippling laugh she turned and left them.

If they had been upon an island in the sea,

on an oasis in the desert, beyond all human sound or reach, those two could not have been more utterly alone than in that one supreme moment.

What was the blaze of the myriad lights, the mad reel of the waltz, the murmur of conversation, to them? Nothing.

They were alone.

Then their eyes met, mingled and swept the future together, and they could never be alone again.

"Oh! Archie."

"Mary!" He had never spoken her name before. "Mary, you understand."

Then, too, for one brief instant their hands clasped and clung.

A minute more separated them. But did they not understand?

To the man it was ineffably sweet and the sweetness was all joy; but to the woman that great joy was likewise a great pain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The next morning Langstreth rode over to Aidenn. The gates were shut, but when one of the gardeners recognized him he let him in; at the house, however, he was refused admittance.

"Mrs. Flodden-Field is receiving no one," the footman told him. "I was to give you this note if you called, sir."

Langstreth took the envelope from the servant. It exhaled a faint orris. The crest, with its' motto *A l' Abri* wrought in silver, met his eyes.

"Mrs. Flodden-Field bade me ask, sir," continued the footman, "would you have a glass of sherry and a biscuit, sir?"

But Archie felt that he could neither eat nor drink. He knew that something had happened and almost for the first time in his life his hand trembled as he broke the seal.

It was a short letter, scarcely covering a page, and at first a mist in his eyes prevented his seeing distinctly. It was dated the evening

before and he knew that it must have been written within an hour of their parting.

"My dearest," it said, "before I go to sleep to-night I have something to say to you. It is this—you must go away.

"I love you; words can say no more. Some time, when I have steeled my heart a little, when I am stronger, I may be able to see you again. I am too weak to bid you stay, loving you. God grant you strength to go.

"When I can bear it, dearest, I will send for you and you will come to me."

There was nothing else, except the name "Mary" written below.

.

"Here is the sherry, sir."

Whether he had staggered Langstreth did not know. The man-servant was facing him smilelessly and held out a glass of wine.

"Thank you," said Archie; "here is my card. Will you give it to Mrs. Flodden-Field?"

Then he called for his horse and rode slowly down the drive toward the sea.

Yes, he would go away, to the ends of the world, across seas. His love was strong enough

for that. It was stronger than death and it needed to be, for this was harder than death; to go away in the first knowledge of his love. But he would go.

At the club that evening when Miss Chesinde's engagement was run from lip to lip, some one asked what would become of Langstreth.

"He has gone away," declared Bertie Girande, who originated a scandal as cleverly as he conducted a cotillion. "Val Mortayne is rich enough to buy even Langstreth's loyalty. He has gone to Java, or Japan, or somewhere, for shooting."

That same evening, later on, at a ball given in honor of a foreign potentate, Regy Dynevor told Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne of Langstreth's departure.

"Shooting!" she repeated, scornfully. "What nonsense. People don't shoot in Japan and Java; they drink tea and coffee."

Evelyn Thorne grew pale when she heard that Langstreth had gone. She danced one waltz and then sat down. Everything began to reel. "I think I must go home," she said to her mother. "I am—ill."

Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne reluctantly took her away. "I don't believe you are ill at all," she told her, unpityingly. "It is all on account of Archie Langstreth. I wish he were in Jerusalem!"

Evelyn forbore to remark that both Japan and Java were equally distant.

"Besides," went on Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne, warming to the regret of her lost supper, "if Regy Dynevor gets it into his head that you are in love with Langstreth—"

"Mamma!"

"Yes, indeed," she said, grandiloquently. "You'll have to play your cards very differently if you want to catch Regy."

"Catch him!" repeated Evelyn. She sat up erect in the carriage, and the street-lamps as they flashed by showed her face flushed with anger and shame. "Catch him! I would not marry him for anything. I would starve first."

"Do you dare to tell me you will refuse him?"

"I shall not refuse him, mamma, because I shall not permit him to ask anything of me. I have thought about this a long time. It is

bad enough to think of marrying a man you do not love, but to think of marrying a man you despise is the devil."

"Evelyn!"

"Yes," she said with triumph, "the devil."

"I will not have you say such things to me," cried her mother. "It is disgusting."

"It is not so disgusting as for you to wish me to marry Mr. Dynevor. That is disgusting."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne with as much dignity as the rolling of the carriage would allow, "I am sure I do not understand you. Disgusting! He is one of the biggest catches in New York."

"He is one of the biggest fools," said Evelyn. "I am sick of the whole business. Why don't you marry him yourself and be done with it?"

Then Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's patience broke down altogether. She forgot all the beatitudes and every word of the XIII, chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, and called Evelyn hard names. "I really believe you want to marry Langstreth," she finished furiously.

"I don't want to marry anybody," declared Evelyn, "and I won't be bullied."

"Bullied!" Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne thought she should faint at the word. She told her that if she did not choose to marry Regy she could go to—to Westchester and live with her grandmother. Westchester was another word for perdition in Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne's vocabulary.

"Well, I don't choose," said Evelyn as the carriage turned in at the great stone gates; "and all I can say is that it makes a girl want to be a man."

There was nothing more said on the subject then, but Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne felt that she had been guilty of bringing an abnormal being into the world—a girl who had refused to ally herself with a man who was worth millions, for the trifling reason that she did not love him.

Miss Chesinde's engagement was a nine days' wonder. Everybody declared that she was the cleverest woman of her time and there was great clamoring to inspect the jewels which Mortayne showered upon her.

She received everything as she received his kisses—smilelessly, but without reluctance.

“Oh!” he exclaimed one day. “If I could only make you love me.”

“Love,” she replied, “grows like a flower. Be content to be the gardener.”

Then one day she said to Mrs. Flodden-Field, “I have decided to be married in a month.”

“Is not that very soon?”

“Soon? Ask Mr. Mortayne,” she replied. “He will tell you it is an age—an æon.”

It was about this time that she received a letter from Mrs. Clandon who was at Hamburg.

“My dear Viola,” she wrote. “When I heard your good news I was not at all surprised. You will acknowledge that I did not blame or question you when you broke your engagement with Guy. I think, even then, I foresaw this. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you made your own happiness. There is nothing I can do for you now, except to give you your trousseau. You will be one of the richest women in the world. Please remember me

to Mr. Mortayne; and believe me, that I wish you every joy."

Miss Chesinde gave the rumpled pages to Mrs. Flodden-Field. "Aunt Edith is so naive," she said. "She believes that I broke with Guy simply to marry Mr. Mortayne."

Mrs. Flodden-Field made no response.

"And what do you believe?" asked Viola.

"Oh! I?"

"Yes; do you think that when I came home I had made up my mind to marry him?"

"I have always believed that you—loved—Archie Langstreth."

"Love—love—" she exclaimed. "There is no such thing as love! A man because he is strong and a woman because she is fair—"

"Do you not love Valentine Mortayne?"

"I have not thought of love," replied Miss Chesinde slowly. "There is a beautiful woman in Paris whose name is Léonie Barras. She is a Tunisienne. Her face is as pure as a saint's dream. Once, when Valentine Mortayne was traveling, he saw her. She was sixteen then—a child. He told her a pretty story of love in the moonlight of the tropic night.

Then he strung her neck with precious stones and twined her hair with pearls." She paused, turning more fully toward her hostess. The wind caught a loose lock of her hair and trailed it like gold threads across her forehead. Then she went on:

"To me, also, he told that little story of love; only to me he offered marriage, because my virtue put me beyond the reach of pearls and precious stones."

"Oh! Viola, do not say such things. Marriage is the one gift a man can offer to a woman he loves."

Miss Chesinde smiled with pitying incredulity. "My dear friend," she said slowly, "marriage is the price of virtue and love is its franchise—that is all."

From that day Mrs. Flodden-Field eschewed the subject; she smarted under the cold cynicism of Viola's words. She performed her duties as hostess with untiring kindness albeit with a heavy heart. She welcomed Valentine Mortayne to her house and undertook the entire responsibility of the wedding prepara-

tions, insisting that the marriage should take place at Aidenn.

Mortayne fulfilled every requirement of a lover, and everybody declared that Miss Chesinde was a very lucky woman. For her own part she bore herself with dignity and grace, receiving the flatteries and adulation of her world very much as she accepted the splendid jewels which, from time to time, Mortayne showered upon her, as if they were hers by right and beyond question.

If, at any time, her heart was heavy, the world, in general, did not know it. She went through the pageant of the season gaily, lavish of her smiles, and charmed all who met her by her beauty and brilliance.

A halo of grandeur environed her; the prospect of her splendid future stretched before her in golden rays. She embellished her reveries with imperial magnificence. The luxury of her presence increased, and she enchained her lover by the wealth and regality of her loveliness.

Only once her elation forsook her. Arrayed in the spotless splendor of her wedding robes,

crowned with diamonds, she was contemplating her glittering reflection, when a velvet case was brought to her. Within, upon a white cushion, lay a wonderful spray of roses, wrought in brilliants and enameled leaves. A mist gathered before her eyes, and, as she closed the case gently, a little sigh troubled the perfection of her lips.

"Oh, Viola! how beautiful you are," cried Mrs. Flodden-Field as she entered the room.

Miss Chesinde suddenly grew pale; there seemed to be the scent of roses in the air.

She turned to her friend quickly and discovered that she carried a mass of roses in her hand, and that there were roses nestling at her breast.

"What lovely—flowers," she said, with a little catching of her breath. "How—sweet—they are."

"They are very sweet to me," replied Mary Flodden-Field in a happy whisper. "They were sent to me to-day by Archie Langstreth. Are you ready? It is time. How white you are, Viola."

"Yes, I am ready. Brides are always pale;

it is their title of purity," said Miss Chesinde.

She gathered up the snowy orchids which her lover had sent her, and within an hour she was Valentine Mortayne's wife.

CHAPTER XIX.

The summer died; autumn came and went, and on the last day of the year Langstreth found himself back in New York again. The paving-stones, the rumbling trucks, the tangle of the electric lights were all pleasant to him. For months he had lived in silence.

He went about his rooms with the glad freedom of a released prisoner; every object seemed doubly dear to him. Upon his writing table stood a great jar of roses; a pile of unopened letters lay beneath a paper weight. He had given his address to no one, except to one woman; all the world beside was nothing to him.

But one letter, which he touched fondly, which he even raised to his lips now and then, was open and its pages gave evidence of much reading. It had come to him in the heart of the Canadian forest, where his guide was his only companion, and he had gone out a long way from their hut and read it alone for the

first time, beneath the snow-capped pines. He had read it again and again, a hundred times, and even when every word was graven on his memory. Standing at home among the other objects which he knew so well, his eyes caressed the written words:

"Come to me, dearest," the letter said. "Come when the New Year comes. God in His great wisdom has taken my husband from me. After a life-long sorrow, of which you know, peace has been granted me. It is too soon to talk of love, dear; but come to me. What reparation lay in his power my husband has made; he has left me his fortune unprovisionally. I told him my secret, Archie, and he left a message for you. But it is a message which only my own lips can give."

That was all.

"Come to me."

Go to her.

The great waste of snowy forest seemed transformed into a garden of the tropics, sensuous with the scent of the Indes. "Come to me." Oh, God! how sweet those words sounded.

He had gone, speedily. Already the year was old and grey. And now, he had come, he was near her—within a little distance of that fair woman whom he loved.

He threw himself down upon a low couch and covered his face with his hands, remembering those things, his weary waiting and his present joy. The flicker of the fire reached his eyes through the crevices between his fingers. The subtle perfume of roses pervaded the air. Who had put those roses there? Only one person in the world—one woman, knew that he would be at home. She knew because she had said, "Come."

A strange presentiment of gladness rushed over him. In a curious way it seemed that life was at an end, and yet he knew that, in truth, life was just beginning.

To-morrow would be the new year, the beginning of a new life; the beginning of that love which would be life to him.

He got up and fastened a rose in his button-hole. Some loosened leaves fluttered softly to the floor, and he chose his steps carefully, as if from fear of crushing them. He took a book from

one of his cases; but when he came to a love scene he tossed it away with a laugh. Love! As if words could express it! His own love was as deep as the sea—as strong, as vast; and yet he had spoken no word.

He smoked a cigarette, and then another; but they left him unsatisfied. At last he bethought himself of his club.

"I will go and hunt up Vally," he said to himself, "and we will drink to the health of the new year."

He went out, accordingly, and the cold night air seemed like champagne. He walked on with joy in his heart. A few flakes of light snow were falling, and he turned up the collar of his overcoat. He did not count the blocks or notice the street crossings, until he became aware, suddenly, that some one was speaking to him—had, indeed, spoken twice; and then he saw a hand held out to him.

"Langstreth, I am glad to see you."

It was Guy Clandon, looking almost handsome in a huge fur coat.

For an instant Langstreth's old repugnance for this man came over him. He felt that the

gladness at the meeting, if there were any, was all on one side. Nevertheless, something in Clandon's manner, and his own charity of heart, prompted him to extend his hand in return.

"So you are back again," he said, noting the change that had come over Clandon. His eyes had lost their blurred look of dissipation, and there was a faint glow of returning health in his face.

"Yes, I have turned up again. You know the proverb of the bad penny. I have just been into the club, but I did not stay long; the fact is—" he paused with a flush of embarrassment, "I was looking for you."

"For me?"

"I want to ask you to do me a favor."

Langstreth had hardly brought himself to that state of charity in regard to all his neighbors in which to grant a favor to a man whom he despised; but the change in Clandon's manner disarmed him for a moment and he said something about being glad to help him if possible.

Guy looked up at the splashes of light which glared from the club windows. "Well," he

said a little desperately, as a man plunges into cold water, "I want you to be my boy's godfather, and let him bear your name. I married Pussy Le Clare yesterday—it is never too late to mend, they say. She has told me of all your kindness to her. The baby was born this morning; he is a jolly little chap, and I'll make him worthy of your name if his life and mine are spared."

There was a moment of silence as the two men stood there together with clasped hands. Langstreth was the first to speak and his voice was not as steady as usual when he told Clandon he would be his boy's godfather, and sent messages to his wife. "You are an honest man, Guy," he said, "and I am proud to have my name borne by a son of yours."

In another minute they separated, and Archie's kindly heart was full of a new joy. In truth the old year, with its dead sorrows, was over. The snow was falling softly, covering all its irregularities as with a shroud.

He turned into the club, and at the door Regy Dynevor met him.

"Hullo!" he exclaimed in a shrill voice
 "How do you do? and good-bye."

"How are you," said Langstreth. "You are just going out?"

Dynevov was being helped into his overcoat and was much troubled concerning the fate of the gardenia he wore. "Mind my flower," he cried to the servant, and added: "Clumsy devil."

"Well, I'll see you again," said Langstreth, passing on.

"Ultimately, perhaps," replied Regy. "I'm off to-morrow."

"Oh! far? For long?"

"Sail for Havre to-morrow. Cannes this winter. Jolly little villa. Mrs. Thorney Thorne." Then he laughed fatuously.

"I wish you good luck. Please remember me to Mrs. Thorncroft Thorne and to Miss Thorne."

"Oh! I say," sneered Regy, insolently.

"Say it, then." Langstreth faced him sharply with a severer question in his eyes than in his tone.

"As if you did not know!"

"What?"

"About Evelyn Thorne."

"I know nothing. I have been away for months," said Archie, feeling that he was demeaning himself by so much as talking to Dynevor. "Is Miss Thorne—dead?"

"Dead? No," he replied. "She has entered the noviciate and is going to take complete vows. Well, ta-ta!" The door closed and Langstreth heard his insolent laugh again.

He went up the stairs, giving a pleasant word to some of the servants whom he met, and made his way into the reading-room. Here he found Mortayne. He was sitting alone in a corner with a cigar between his teeth and his feet on a chair in front of him.

He did not get up as Langstreth approached him and Archie noticed a certain change which had come in his face, as subtle as it was inexplicable. They shook hands and Mortayne rang the bell and asked Langstreth what he would drink.

"And how is Canada?" he demanded.

"Oh," said Archie, as he sat down, "Canada is well enough, but New York is better."

Something in his voice drew Mortayne's eyes to his friend's face, and a faint pang smote him as he remembered the old days.

"You look as happy as—as—"

"I am happy," said Archie.

"Woman, eh?" asked Mortayne. "It is always a woman."

"Yes, it is a woman." Then he was silent as if to bring the subject to a close.

"Never mind," said Mortayne, indolently. "Perhaps, some day you will tell me."

"Perhaps, some day, I shall, Vally."

Then the waiter returned bringing their drinks. Mortayne murmured something about good luck for the coming year, and drained his glass. "I must be moving," he exclaimed after a moment. "I am going to eat supper with Viola."

"How is Mrs. Mortayne?"

Valentine shrugged his shoulders. "I have not laid eyes on her for two days," he said. "She has innumerable engagements. Every man in New York sees more of her than I do." Then he laughed: "And I see more of every other woman."

His tone and words made Langstreth shudder. "I shall call upon your wife, at once," he said. "When will she be at home?"

"I think she will be at home whenever you come," replied Mortayne, "if you will let her know that you are coming." He got up from his chair and stood with his back to the fire. "Come to supper, now," he added. "Viola will be delighted to see you. She has been dining at the Van-Hoffman's."

Archie hesitated for an instant. "Thanks," he said; "all right, I'll go."

They went down stairs and were helped into their fur coats. Mortayne lighted a fresh cigar. "I always walk home, nowadays," he said, as they went out. "It helps to clear my brain. One gets so fuddled living with a woman."

To this, Langstreth did not reply. The night was perfectly clear and frosty. The snow had stopped falling and lay in untrodden whiteness. They walked on in silence until they had passed beyond the lights of the club windows.

"We were talking of women," said Mortayne. —"in there."

"I," said Langstreth, "was talking of one woman."

Mortayne laughed. "They are all alike," he declared; "one or another. See here!" He pulled a sheet of crumpled, yellow paper out of his pocket and gave it to Langstreth, "Read that."

They stopped beneath a gaslight and Archie spread the sheet upon the palm of his hand. It was a telegram, dated Washington and addressed to Mortayne at his club.

"Come and spend New Year's Day with me," it said. *"My husband is away."* It was signed, *"Nina."*

"Do you know her?" asked Mortayne.

"No."

"She is charming. She has the prettiest little figure in the world and the most fetching little French accent, and the 'chicest' gowns—I am not so particular about the gowns."

"Well," said Archie, "are you going?"

"Going? Yes. How can I get out of it?"

"Do you think it fair?"

"Fair?—to whom?"

"To her husband—whoever he is."

"He isn't even a particular friend of mine. It would be unfair to her to stay away," said Mortayne as he took the telegram and tore it to pieces. "She has arranged everything now. I may have been to blame in the first place, perhaps, but now, when things have gone so far—"

"How far?"

"Far enough for her to get her husband out of the way—and send for me," he explained with some irritation. "Besides there is no excuse to give when a woman asks a man to spend New Year's day with her."

"You might rake up an excuse somehow. You might even say you wanted to stay with your wife."

Mortayne gave another short laugh, "I should be a coward if I didn't go," he said.

Langstreth had his own ideas on the subject of cowardice, "I'd kill myself," he declared, "if there were no other way. I wouldn't go into another man's house like that; why it's theft—worse."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mortayne. "If a man leaves good booty unprotected he must

expect to have it stolen. It is his own fault for not looking after the lock and key properly. You are not going to set up for the cardinal virtues, are you?"

"I am not setting up for anything," said Archie.

Just then the great house on the corner came into view.

"By the way," asked Mortayne, as they crossed the avenue, "what have you done with Pussy Le Clare?"

"Done with her? Well, she's married."

"Oh, oh!"

"Yes, Clandon came up to the mark like a man."

"Clandon? Great God!" Mortayne's laugh was louder this time. "So you managed it that way. And how about the child?"

"It was born to-day, and Clandon is going to name it after me."

"You are a clever chap," replied Mortayne with a shade of scorn in his voice. "I thought you were clever enough when I heard that Evelyn Thorne had taken the veil, but upon my soul this is better. And so the child will

bear your name? There is something charmingly appropriate in that. Ah! here we are at home."

The huge house was brilliant with lights, but as they entered, the butler informed them that Mrs. Mortayne had not returned.

"She keeps the gas burning as if there were a republican election going on," said Valentine, as he gave the order for supper.

"Will you not wait for your wife?" asked Archie.

Mortayne led the way into a small apartment, circular in shape, perfect in decoration.

"Wait?" he inquired, incredulously. "It is too late to begin to wait for each other now."

CHAPTER XX.

It was not long, however, before Mrs. Mortayne arrived. There was a commotion at once in the hall, and several bells rang.

"It means nothing," explained Mortayne indifferently. "They are ringing for her women; she has half a dozen. She spends fifty thousand a year on her clothes."

Then Viola entered. She wore a dress that was studded with diamond stars, and there was a galaxy of stars in her hair. When she saw Langstreth a smile illuminated her face, and she went toward him rapidly, with outstretched hands.

"Oh! this is really a new year," she said gladly. "I did not hope for such a surprise." A sudden flush which came upon her cheek made her surpassingly beautiful.

Then she turned to her husband and gave him the tips of her fingers. "You are quite a stranger, Valentine," she went on. "Alys Van Hoffman asked me how you were, but Mrs. Ellistown knew more about you than I did."

"Thank you," he said, "I am very well."

"Ah! so Mrs. Ellistown told us," replied Viola, as she took a chair near Langstreth and began to pull off her long gloves. She was dressed in violet velvet, out of which her diamonds gleamed like stars in a winter sky.

Langstreth could only feast his eyes upon her loveliness. Her own heavy-lidded eyes seemed to hold a look of triumph in their calm scrutiny of him.

She refused each delicacy as it was passed to her. "I can not eat," she said, "but I will have some champagne." When her glass was filled she raised it to her lips. "I shall not drink to your health, Archie, because that is perfect. But this is to your happiness."

"That is perfect, too," he told her; but he did not tell her why.

It was a little before midnight when Mortayne got up from the table. He rang the bell and summoned his valet, and gave orders for immediate departure.

"Are you going away?" asked Viola.

"Yes—to Washington."

Langstreth also rose.

"But you are not going," said Mrs. Mortayne.

"No—not to Washington."

They all went forward through the brilliant rooms into the great entrance hall. There were some leathern cases being carried out, and one of the footmen was holding Mortayne's traveling ulster.

"Good-bye," he said.

"Hold on," cried Langstreth. "I will go with you, and you can drop me at the Knickerbocker."

"What nonsense; stay and finish your supper. There are ortolans; and Viola will amuse you," he paused. Then he put his hand in his pocket and took out a key. He looked at it irresolutely, and then hung it upon a hook that projected from the mirror. "It is my latch key," he said with deliberation. "I shall not need it." He then shook hands with Langstreth and kissed his wife.

The front door opened and a gust of frost-laden air rushed in. "Good-bye," called out Viola, and with a little shiver she drew Langstreth behind a portiere into the warm glow of the drawing-room. The door closed and they heard the brougham roll away.

"I am not sure that I ought to have stayed," said Archie. He regretted the words as soon as they were uttered. A look which he could not explain sprang to life in Viola's eyes.

"Oh!" she answered, "as to that you ought not to have come. It is the coming, not the staying that is the—weakness."

"If I were weak to come, at least I am strong to go."

She threw herself down upon a couch that had cloth-of-gold cushions and ivory feet with golden claws.

"Now that you have come," she said slowly, "you will stay."

"Stay?—here? Oh! In New York, you mean?"

She laughed and shrugged her bare shoulders, the movement making all the jewels gleam. "Yes, in New York," she said. Then she looked at him earnestly. "Tell me, what did you go to Canada for?"

"For shooting," he replied. He felt himself miserably weak that he did not tell her the truth; but something in her beauty and the exhilaration of her nearness sealed her lips.

"Now that you have come back I shall not let you go again. My chains will be of roses, but they will not break; you are wearing my rose to-night."

Langstreth's hand went to his forehead as if he had been struck.

"Yours? Oh, God!"

Her smile was alluring.

"How did you know I was coming home?" he demanded. "Who told you?"

"Love."

"Viola! You—we must not talk like this. Love is beyond our reach. We have foregone it."

"We risk nothing," she replied, looking up at him with the old enigma in her eyes.

Then he told her almost sullenly that he must go.

"But why?" she asked with innocently arched eyebrows. He had advanced into the middle of the room and stood facing her as she reclined upon the couch. "Never mind," she went on. "If you will stay I will let you choose your own subjects of conversation since you do not approve of mine."

"Why should I stay?"

"Why not?"

"Well, it is late—for one thing."

"Late! There is no such thing as time." She hesitated a moment with her heels upon the floor and her pretty embroidered toes turned up. "But I shall not keep you," she added, with a little laugh.

"You need not be afraid."

"I am not afraid."

"Yes you are. You are afraid of me."

"I am afraid of myself," he said.

She got up and went to his side. "Will you stay then?"

"Stay—here?"

She laughed and made a gesture of mock incredulity. "A little while—five minutes."

"Yes—or ten."

"Only five. Will you sit down?"

He turned from one side to the other as if looking for a seat.

"In that chair," said Viola, pointing to a low ottoman which stood in the shadow of a rose-shaded lamp.

Langstreth sat down. She then went to the

bell and touched it, and before the servant answered her summons she had resumed her own seat among the cloth-of-gold cushions.

"I will lock the door," she told the footman who appeared in the aperture of the portiere. "You may put out all the lights—except these and the hall lanterns. That is all, good-night." She dismissed him with the wave of her hand.

"Why do you send him away?" asked Archie.

"To be alone with you," she said. "All these footmen in livery weary me. I am tired to death of their striped waistcoats. Valentine's one idea of happiness seems to be to have myriads of menials ready for action."

"I thought that was your idea of happiness."

"I have changed all that," she replied with a shrug.

Langstreth looked at her in her wealth of beauty, amid her imperial surroundings, robed in velvet, crowned with diamonds; and he wondered whether, after all, she had missed that happiness which she had always declared riches alone could bring.

"Are you happy?" he asked her.

She raised her delicate brows. "Happiness,

my dear friend, is an expensive luxury. There is only one thing that can buy it."

"One thing?"

She leaned over and touched his hand as it lay upon his knee. "Love."

"Only that one thing—love," he repeated.

"You love me, Archie."

"You make me miserable when you talk like this."

"But you love me."

"Viola!"

She lifted her hand. "Say 'I love you?'" she commanded.

"You know I love you," he exclaimed. "I would—" He broke off desperately, and getting up, went to the window and put his face against the cold pane.

"You love me enough to be made miserable by me," she said, rapidly, "but not enough—not nearly enough to be made perfectly happy by me."

He turned from the window, and she arose. They met in the middle of the room. She noticed that he was deathly pale, and when he held out his hand, which she took, it was cold.

"Good-bye."

"Oh! are you going?"

"I must," he told her.

"Well, I will go into the hall with you," she said, "and help you on with your overcoat. I ought to have kept Bernard up."

"I would rather have you."

"Oh! thank you;" and she laughed, making him a mock curtsy as they passed beneath the embroidered portiere.

As she stood before the mirror she reconfined a wayward curl which had become loosened from its place—she paused, a little sigh trembled her lips. There hung the key upon its silver hook, where her husband had left it. She hesitated; then she raised her right hand to it.

"What time is it?" she asked, with forced unconcern, as if she were waiting for something whose arrival was dreaded yet inevitable.

Langstreth looked at his watch. "Almost twelve," he said; "almost the new year."

"Let me see." She went close to his side and took the watch in her hand. "You are my new year," she said.

Her breath fanned his face with warm fragrance; she put the watch back into his pocket slowly, with her right hand.

At the same moment the midnight bells rang.

Mrs. Mortayne threw open the great carved door, letting in the frosty air. Some snow crystals fluttered in and circled about her. "Welcome!" she cried, with a sort of childish gaiety which sat strangely upon the crowned woman. Then, turning to the man at her side, "So—I will open the door to you," she said. "You, who are my New Year."

"Go back," he commanded, sternly. "You will get cold."

"I shall never be cold again."

"Go back." Their hands met.

"Oh! How strong you are," she said.

"Good-night!"

.
When Langstreth got home he found the lamps still burning; he remembered that he had told his servant to go to bed, not intending to be out late himself. He began to undress quickly, thinking that the oil must be far spent. There were a few coals still alive in the grate

and he stirred them into a blaze and sat down. If the lamps went out there was gas he could resort to. He took a cigarette from his case and lighted it, indolently. He leaned back in the chair and put his feet upon a bank of cushions. A delicious sense of rest came over him, and he closed his eyes.

No sound roused him but he suddenly started up with a curious feeling of surprise. It was dark. The lamps had burned out and the smell of oil met his nostrils. He put his hand into his pocket—a bell was ringing, and he wondered what time it was. When he drew out his watch he felt a metallic substance strike its gold case. He got up and fumbled among his smoking paraphernalia for the matches; then he lighted the gas and the sudden glare made him shudder.

It was two o'clock by his watch. He looked at the white face as it lay in his palm, and next to it was a key.

He had carried no key. His own keys were together on a ring and chain; he pulled them roughly from the pocket of his trousers and counted them. They were all there.

He went and stood beneath the flaring gas-jet; his eyes had grown accustomed to the glare, and he examined the key. There seemed nothing strange in it, save that it should have been in his pocket at all. Then something made him draw his breath quickly. There were two small letters engraved upon the flat portion of the key. These letters were V. M.

"Viola Mortayne! Oh, God!" The cry was wrung from his heart. Then he laughed. "The key is Valentine Mortayne's," he said aloud, trying to steady his nerves.

He laid it down upon the table. He felt cold from head to foot, and there seemed a hand of ice at his throat.

He walked slowly from one end of the room to the other and back again. In front of his writing-table he stopped; there were the roses in the bowl, and upon the ground some leaves had fallen, like scented snow. A letter lay there, also, with its signature exposed; how well he knew that hand, how well he loved the name, how he had waited and longed for its coming. There, too, lay the key.

Well, to-morrow he would send it back.

To-morrow? No, to-day—this first day of the New Year. He would send—it—back. Send it? Good God—take it!

Two cold drops oozed out of his temples and ran slowly down his face to his throat.

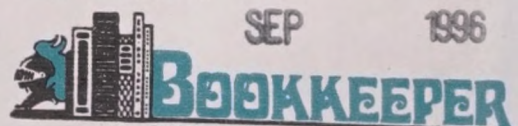
He stood perfectly still. Then, with averted eyes, he stretched out his hand and opened a drawer. Something gleamed wanly in the light.

He moved slightly as if to examine this thing. There was a flash, a crash—a puff of smoke, and he fell forward to the floor where the dead rose leaves lay.

THE END.

NEW YORK, 1892.

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:



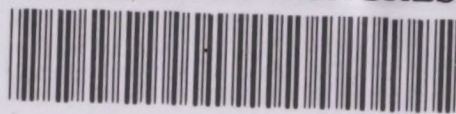
SEP

1996

PRESERVATION TECHNOLOGIES, INC.
111 Thomson Park Drive
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066
(412) 779-2111

NS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014853121